

The Gateway fine arts

realism highlights nfb movie

Some day an observer of wild-life is going to build a blind in the middle of society and attempt to watch the human teenager at play. It has been done in the past with tigers and gorillas, so why should it be impossible with teenagers, who are only slightly wilder than the other two species?

Until that day, however, we will have to make do with *Nobody Waved Goodbye*, the National Film Board's second excursion into full length features.

Where in the past we have had to be satisfied with the Walt Disney treatment of teenagers (the same as the Disney treatment of nature—cute, coy, folksy, just a bit beyond belief) now we have the observer's report.

Once you get past the hokey title (designed to draw in the teenagers, perhaps?) *Nobody Waved Goodbye* turns into a good film. The Gidgets and the Tammys and the Avalon-Funicellos will probably hate it: "Howcum no one ever sez enny thun gud about teenagers?" But they'll have mis-seen the show.

Sketched in the familiar, stark, bleak documentary style of the NFB, the film employs a very conscious camera eye. Perspectives are always clear. Backgrounds are always in motion; foci change; there's no lingering on images. But it comes out real in a way that *David and Lisa* wasn't. That film never got over being a case study; this film never tries to be one. Oh, the social workers will have a field day with it; but they should keep their hands off it if they have any feelings.

For all that it's a very human sort of film, it doesn't probe the human involvement as much as it senses the urban landscape.

Highways. Bridges. Billboards. City parks. Subway stations. Rain-damped headlights. Scooters and stolen cars. And always the movement through this landscape.

The dialogue is intriguing. It's cliché, and no-one tries to make poetry out of it. It's not a crime to let actors improvise, at least here where the subject is cliché. The meagreness of Peter's vocabulary ties him down. He can't make himself understood. Everyone speaks the same language, but it has no real meaning. (I watched a part of *A Certain Smile* later the same evening on TV; there, where the actors were delivering written clichés, they couldn't make them sound convincing, despite the fact that most of them probably have spoken that way all their lives.)

But the real hero of *Nobody Waved Goodbye* is the camera. Adapting journalism to film presented no problem for the NFB film-makers. They've done it so well so long. And they were fortunate in picking a subject that suited their style. Documentary movies, in fact, seem usually to be more successful than documentary fiction.

Lonely Boy, the NFB short on Paul Anka, accompanied the main feature. Comparisons with *Nobody Waved Goodbye* are almost forced on us, for the same documentary style is employed. Anka, drifting in the environment he is

incapable of coping with, moves in the same urban landscape, sweeping on miles of concrete highway, glowing in the glare of Klieg lights, smiling at the fat faces.

In conclusion: film is the only medium that can adequately describe the modern city. No words, not even those of Tom Wolfe (*Time*-style for intellectuals), can hope to do what film can so rapidly do, even without message, without sympathy.

This is the world where Peter and Julie and Paul wander, and where we wander. The National Film Board has done a very good job of doing away with daffodils. That's an accomplishment.

—Jon Quill

ayrton show at gallery is excellent

The U of A Fine Arts Gallery opened its fall season last Friday night with the first North American showing of the work of the English artist Michael Ayrton. Ayrton's consummate technical skill has placed him in the top ranks of British graphic art, and the drawings on exhibit provide an excellent introduction to his work.

Ayrton's figure drawing is probably the most exciting aspect of his art, for it indicates how technical mastery can liberate the artist. "Serpentine Figure", "Demeter in Winter" and "Bone Sentinel" represent tremendous licenses taken with human anatomy, made successful by the artist's tremendous competence. One returns to these drawings again and again; they are compelling in their excellence.

It is a truism that the great artist can transcend the limitations of any particular media. When looking at an Ayrton drawing, one is immediately reminded of sculpture.

This effect is created by Ayrton's treatment of his subject; like the sculptor, he deals with mass under tension. It is difficult to view "Fat Man, Head Under Stress" (see picture) without thinking of Leonard Baskin's "Fat Man"; and the contours of the portrait of C. P. Snow are reminiscent of one of John Ivor-Smith's cast stone heads. Like the sculptor, Ayrton deals with the figure in relation to space, rather than in relation to component parts on paper. This is particularly true of "Talos", in which a single figure emerges, in depth, from a completely blank background.

A fine artist's sensibility emerges constantly through Ayrton's choice and handling of his subjects. His themes seem drawn largely from myth (myth being the deepest and most universal human experience). Of signal importance in Ayrton's myth-drawings is the grotesque. The Daedalus drawings depict man distorted by his own follies; "Mazed Minotaur" displays a dumb, deformed creature whose predicament is due to a cruel quirk of Fate.

Everywhere is apparent a conciseness and clarity which seemed in danger of being buried under the tons of paint and ink hurled by the abstract expressionists.

The Ayrton show is significant and exciting; an auspicious beginning for the U of A gallery's season.

—Jackie Foord



—Stearn photo

FAT MAN, HEAD UNDER STRESS—One of the grimmer of the drawings by Michael Ayrton being displayed at the Fine Arts Gallery. Also on view are portraits (Wyndham Lewis, William Golding, C. P. Snow), figure-drawings and mythological scenes.

la traviata shows skill, artistic merit

Verdi's opera "La Traviata" is being presented this week by the Edmonton Professional Opera Association.

Live opera performances in Edmonton are so rare that they are worth seeing no matter how abominable they are (e.g. last year's "Don Giovanni"), but the current production can be recommended on its own artistic merits.

The EPOA has shown steady and consistent improvement over the last two years, and now both orchestra and chorus have a good grasp of the essentials of opera.

In the past, the orchestra has been as good as its conductor, and in last season's production of "Carmen" it reached its peak under Brian Priestman.

Well, Mr. Priestman is back for "La Traviata", and his skills as a leader and craftsman are again making themselves evident.

"La Traviata" is one of Verdi's best operas, and so, one of the best of all operas. It has everything a greedy impresario could ask for—abundant melody, numerous dramatically effective moments, and a slightly off-color plot.

It is also one of the most popular operas in the repertoire, and consequently a predictable choice for production in Edmonton.

Mirabile dictu, the premiere performance of the opera at Venice in 1853 was a total fiasco. Francis Toye explains the reasons for its failure:

"The tenor was hoarse; the baritone in particular, considering his part of insufficient importance, took little trouble; the prima donna, though a good singer, was a very plump, robust lady, whose death of consumption in the last act provoked a regular epidemic of laughter among an audience as yet operatically unvaccinated by a success of flabby Brunnhildes, pot-bellied Siegfrieds, and bediamonded Mimis."

But the old saying, "You can't

keep a good opera down" was proved again in short order, and soon "Traviata" was playing to packed houses all over Europe, made up mainly of illicit lovers seeking reassurance and moral support. Since then, its popularity has not waned.

For once in his life Verdi had a workable libretto, containing no ghosts, long-lost brothers, burnt babies, or any of the other odds and ends that litter the plots of most of his other operas. With that unerring dramatic instinct which was his chief virtue, Verdi responded to it brilliantly, and produced an opera that could not fail to please both critics and public.

Here I will attempt to give a short plot summary, one which gives only the most superficial idea of what the opera is about. The plot is mainly concerned with a courtesan, Violetta Valery, the only real character in the libretto. She is engaged in a life of dissipation and debauchery when the opera opens.

A wild party is in progress, and during the course of it Violetta is introduced to a young man named Alfredo Germont (the Hero).

He tells her that he has been passionately in love with her for a period of some months.

Needless to say, by the beginning of the second act, Violetta and Alfredo are living together in her house in the country.

One day while Alfredo is out, his father Giorgio (usually known simply as Germont) visits Violetta and pleads with her to leave Alfredo, for the sake of respectability and Alfredo's sister (engaged to a Rich Young Man).

Violetta's better instincts prevail, and she secretly leaves, without explaining to Alfredo, who would never agree if he knew the real story.

Alfredo is hopping mad at Violetta because of what he thinks is her infidelity (he really is quite stupid), and refuses to see her.

By this time, Violetta has galloping consumption, and when Alfredo insults her in public, her psychological and physiological torments prove too much for her, and she becomes critically ill. End of Act II.

In the final act, Violetta and Alfredo are gloriously reunited (all misunderstandings having been cleared up, and Germont having come clean), and she dies joyously in his arms.

Now all opera plots sound a bit funny in synopsis, but that of "La Traviata" has real dramatic merit, both as a whole and in isolated moments of tension.

Verdi's music works perfectly within the limitations of the Italian opera genre.

It follows all the rules of the system without allowing them to interfere with the flow of the action.

The arias are so skillfully bridged with dramatic recitative, and the whole opera so inundated with beautiful melody, that the restrictions of the form seem almost to disappear.

But the real test of an opera must be its dramatic effectiveness, and "La Traviata" is as powerful as any opera ever written.

—Bill Beard

fine arts calendar

Little Symphony Concert—Wednesday—Macdonald Hotel Ballroom—8:30 p.m.

"La Traviata"—Thursday, Saturday—Jubilee—8:30 p.m.

Feiffer Satirical Review (14 performers, brought from Calgary, reputedly hilarious)—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—Yardbird Suite (8039-102 St.)—9:30 p.m.

"Mary, Mary" (Broadway hit comedy)—Oct. 6-16—Walterdale Playhouse—8:30 p.m.

Michael Ayrton Drawings—to Oct. 29—Fine Arts Gallery (9021-112th Street)—7-9 p.m.

The Edmonon Chamber Music Society's program for this season includes a quartet from Stockholm, a trio from Winnipeg, and a consort of early instruments, as well as various local groups: five recitals in all.

Students may purchase season membership for the ridiculously low sum of \$4. But only season members can get into the concerts: no tickets are sold at the door.

Since the first concert (featuring the early instrumental consort) is on October 13 (8:30 p.m. in Con Hall), it behooves interested music-lovers to dash down to the Allied Arts Box Office or to the Extension Department as soon as possible to buy their memberships.