

Un Zoo la Nuit: violent contrast

Un Zoo La Nuit
Princess Theatre
Jan. 15th - Jan 21

by Jerome Ryckborst

Met Marcel, a convict. He gets ranked by a bodybuilder, a real hunk. Huge. Marcel doesn't like it. Violence ensues. Marcel gets it anyway.

Of course it's only a movie. Marcel is an actor, but the film's success is real. *Un Zoo La Nuit* (*Night Zoo*) won best Canadian Film in Montreal, the Critics' Choice Prize in Toronto, and critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival.

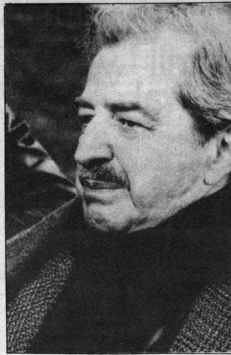
Night Zoo is a film of parallels and contrasts. A thriller, to be sure. With its violence, drugs and sex, this film is fast to grab attention; but its tenderness is the key to its success, the tenderness of a father and son.

It is delightful to watch Marcel (Gilles Maheu) and his father Albert. At times it seems they would rather nunchuck and screaming from the set, yet they are drawn together. "You are still my son and that means something to me," says Albert. So the two of them try, and the film documents the process of learning to get along.

Father and son live on different sides of the generation gap, but filmmaker Jean-Claude Lauzon draws many parallels. Albert is separated, a quiet man who dreams of hunting moose. Marcel, well... he's separated too, and guns play a forceful part in his life. It may seem that Albert lives the life of a peaceful old man, but there is gore on his TV set, and his home is literally and violently torn apart while he sits in the bathtub.

In this film, nothing is sacred. It exploits rape, sex, love and violence equally. Women in this film are props; homosexuals wind up dead. But in spite of its offensive material there is a value in this film, in the way it deals with men.

Lauzon takes a bizarre look at male-male relationships. Marcel is at once a best friend, a son, a boyfriend and a rape victim. It is just as unnerving to see Marcel in bed with his father as it is to see a cop having sex with Marcel's buddy. Marcel is a complete character, very much a man.



Roger Le Bel as Albert

The film doesn't dwell on the development of its characters, it just happens while the story is told. The tender parts are insightful, but so is the hard stuff. On the street Marcel is macho, playing the macabre game. Each character wants to control the others. Give me your money, give me your body. The convict beats the cop, the cop beats the convict. Score: 1-1. Next round.

Lauzon describes his film as "violent and brutal" but he is kind to his audience in one respect: good cinematography. It is slick. The interiors are composites: a barroom filmed in one location, its bathroom somewhere else. On screen you can't tell they are two different buildings. Lauzon has carefully picked each spot to look exactly right. He doesn't like studio sets — they're not real enough.

The story itself is real. Much is based on Lauzon's own life. The rough Montreal neighbourhood and the vicious characters, he claims, are transposed directly from true life to film. Yet parts of it must be fantasy. Lauzon created in *Night Zoo* the relationship between father and son that he never knew. Says he of his father: "we hardly ever spoke. (Cries and argues — vs; talk — no."

In this lies a wry tragedy, because that father-son understanding is the only humanity in the film.

Night Zoo is definitely for adult viewing only. It's not just stereotyped, action-paced thriller. It also deals with some very real frustrations.

Dancers stumbles as drama

Dancers
Cannon Films
Whitemud Crossing, Plaza

review by Elaine Ostry

Dance lovers will like *Dancers*, but lovers of a good drama will not. Baryshnikov's latest acting effort once again proves that he is a much better dancer than an actor.

Dancers follows an interesting, if familiar type of plot: the members of a performing troupe find their lives paralleling those of the characters they are portraying. In *Dancers*, an American ballet company is filming Giselle in Italy.

Baryshnikov's character, Anton Sergeev, is the artistic director of the company. He plays Albrecht, the aristocrat with whom Giselle falls in love. When the peasant girl discovers that he is engaged to another woman, she goes mad and dies. She is then initiated into the sisterhood of the willis, the spirits of young girls who die from a broken heart.

Enter Lisa Strasser, the new girl in the corps, played by Julie Kent. Strasser is youth personified: beautiful, athletic, naive. Sergeev is attracted to her, and then, of course, the plot becomes predictable.

Parallel plots succeed when both plots are strong ones. A good example is Carlo Saura's *Carmen*, which used the background of a flamenco company performing *Carmen*. However, *Dancers* does not have the strong script of *Carmen*. The Giselle story on stage is more dramatic and interesting than its parallel in real life.

For instance, when Strasser realizes that her love for Sergeev is hopeless, she does not go to the lengths of Giselle. No insanity and death for her; instead she goes to a tattoo parlour, which is anticlimactic to say the least. People today simply don't die for love, I guess.

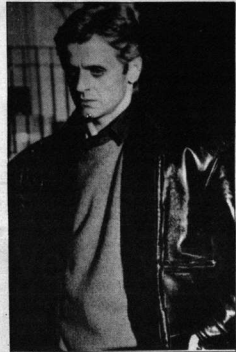
The acting of the main characters was also a weak aspect of the film. Baryshnikov is a fantastic dancer but a wooden actor. He really only comes alive in the performance and rehearsal scenes. Kent looks the part of the young dancer, but her shrill, whining voice makes you want to stop listening. However, her scene with Baryshnikov in which she keeps repeating the phrase "If I could mean something to you..." is memorable. The viewer also keeps expecting her to dance, but she doesn't. As far as classical heroines go, Kent's Strasser is closer to Ophelia than the spirited Giselle.

But Herbert Ross, who has directed Baryshnikov's other acting efforts, *The Turning Point* and *White Nights*, does an excellent job of filming the dance sequences. The rehearsal scenes, in which the dancers recite monologues of what their characters are thinking as they are dancing, are particularly interesting.

The viewer certainly appreciates the physical and emotional efforts required by a major ballet. The interaction between the artistic director and the dancers, particularly the arguments that arise regarding the roles, is fascinating.

Indeed, the dance scenes and the power of the original Giselle story are the highlights of *Dancers*. Also excellent are the supporting actors. Leslie Browne, who played the lead in *The Turning Point*, plays Nadine, a dancer embittered by love gone wrong. Nadine is an intriguing character, but the viewer does not fully understand her situation. Alessandra Ferri plays Francesca, who dances Giselle. She projects a dynamic image, and her dancing is riveting. One wishes that she played the "off-stage Giselle" as well.

Altogether, this is a movie about dancers whose lives parallel those of the roles in Giselle, but do not approximate the drama of the classical story. Ah, if only life would imitate art; as *Dancers* proves, it would then be more exciting.



Looking cool, Baryshnikov

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