

Docu-drama chronicles atomic age

By PAUL PIVATO

The unforeseen implications of Hiroshima are now haunting us. That is the grim message of *Dark Circle*, a docu-drama about human suffering and courage in the atomic age, produced by the Independent Documentary Group (Judy Irving, Chris Beaver, and Ruth Landy). The film premieres tonight at the Music Hall Theatre on Danforth Ave.

Dark Circle uses declassified government film to take the viewer into the secret world of the nuclear establishment. The never-before-seen footage includes hydrogen bomb assembly lines, spectacular explosions of unshielded nuclear reactors, and a test in which 700 pigs dressed in military uniform are exposed to a nuclear bomb blast.

But the most shocking footage is from an annual arms convention in Washington. As merchants of death are shown laughing and chatting, weapons with names like "Hellfire" are marketed in glossy videos. A buxom blonde, outlining the destructive capability of a weapon to prospective buyers, breaks out in giggles.

Dark Circle reveals the eight corporations which help produce hydrogen bombs. With horrible irony, the companies' mottos are shown beneath their names (for instance, General Electric: "Today, something we do will touch your life;" Rockwell International: "Where science gets down to business").

The real horror of *Dark Circle*, however, is the way in which people are being affected by the nuclear industry. In a series of poignant interviews, victims of a nuclear society are presented in stark anguish:

- A young worker at the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Facility outside Denver is interviewed shortly before dying, his head deformed by brain cancer.
- A mother in a nearby subdivision discovers her backyard is contaminated with plutonium.

• A navy veteran, after flying through an atomic cloud during a bomb test, develops leukemia and is denied compensation by the Veteran's Administration.

The film shows graphically how plutonium poisoning from America's nuclear industry is killing the very people it claims to serve. Navy veteran Richard McHugh explains: "The bomb is being used on Americans."

One of the most disturbing, yet darkly comic, interviews is with Stirling Colgate, a crazed weapons designer straight out of Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr. Strangelove*. He grinningly describes himself as a "male human being who likes to see an explosion."

Dark Circle is not shrill "peacenik" propaganda. Its gut-wrenching portrayal of real people affected by the Bomb can unnerve even the most confident supporter of nuclear power. The film's approach is refreshing and insightful. It does not paint scenarios of nuclear Armageddon, but rather demonstrates the connection between nuclear weapons and nuclear power: the "dark circle" which is quietly killing humans in our own backyard.

Dark Circle is at its best when depicting the all-too-real consequences of life in a nuclear society. The pictures of a young girl struck by cancer are vivid and concrete, whereas a catalog of numbers and facts soon becomes numbing. But the film's framing device, a metaphorical shot of geese migrating over a nuclear reactor, does not work. Instead of being lyrical and touching, the scene drips with saccharine sentimentality. Also, the occasionally personal, impassioned tone of the narrator is at odds with the otherwise detached approach of *Dark Circle*.

Dark Circle's mix of human drama and fascinating documentary footage makes it a film both moving and enlightening, one that strikes the heart as well as the mind.

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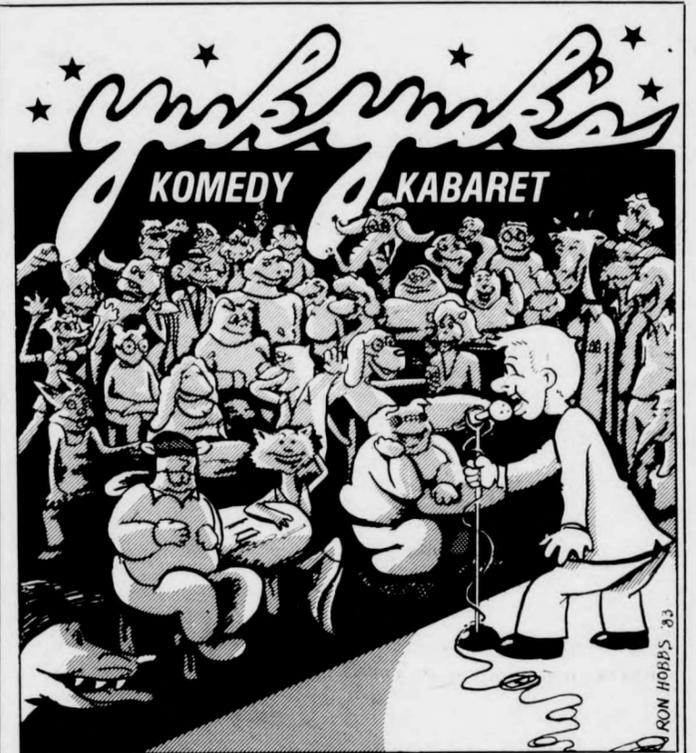
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