

FILM CANADA

"Take One" is a simple, unassuming little journal on film that comes out every two months. During its two year existence it has developed a reputation which has attracted many favourable comments from the press and radio, and has tripled its circulation. Yet, despite its growing distinction, it remains a non-descript, modest sort of pamphlet, one which is not easily noticeable in a bookstore.

Its beginnings were very humble. Editor Peter Lebensold gathered friends and acquaintances interested in film and invited them to submit articles. With a part-time staff, he approached well-known personalities such as Patrick Watson and Judy La Marsh to contribute to the journal. Soon, many readers, known as well as unknown, began mailing in suggestions and articles for publication. "Take One" cultivated a correspondence with each of these writers and film-makers, until a multitude of people throughout the world were donating articles.

One of Lebensold's earliest correspondents was Joe Medjuck of Toronto. Medjuck has been with the magazine since the beginning and presently holds the position of Associate Editor-Publisher. He is a free, easy-talking fellow who gave an hour monologue on his impressions of what the magazine is and what it should be. Having waded my way through all eleven issues, I had already drawn my own conclusions before hearing Medjuck's dissertation. His analysis provided interesting parallel commentary to my own review.

"Take One" contains many knowledgeable articles on all facets of film, but its main characteristic is its inconsistency. Many articles treat interesting topics with intelligence and insight, while just as many are superficial, and too curt to be informative.

"I think our last three issues have been the most consistent. That is, until the last three, we would have one good issue and one rotten issue."

The highlights of my own reading were a couple of essays by Patrick Watson, an article by Godard on two films he was shooting simultaneously, a devastating portrait of Stanley Kramer, a brief piece by Arthur Penn on "Bonnie and Clyde" and an even briefer word from Alfred Hitchcock describing his complicated use of the travelling mat in "The Birds". Low points were articles on Norman McLaren, the Expo films, and Andy Warhol, in which the authors hardly delved into their subject matter at all, but skimmed over it so quickly that there was nothing new to be gained by the reader.

"One of the big faults of the magazine is space. We're so worried about getting every-

thing in we end up cutting stories by ridiculous amounts, and sometimes cutting them very badly.

"A magazine has a feel to it which you get by picking it up and leafing through it and seeing what the stories are. Now, the trouble is, magazines do not always back up that feel. The issue before the last had a great feel to it, probably the best feel ever. It had Godard, Hitchcock, Warhol on the cover. The trouble was, and we never realized it until the whole magazine was out, that there was only one article in the whole stinking magazine that was more than two pages long. Now, you've got to be fairly superficial in two pages."

There are many interviews with those connected with film in one way or another, such as Godard, Hitchcock, Kenneth Anger, and Marshall McLuhan. Like the articles, these conversations vary in quality. Often, the reader can feel the character of the person interviewed and gain some personal appreciation of that individual's philosophy and work. Such is the case in a panel discussion with Godard; this is not the case with a perfunctory, shallow confrontation with underground star Donna Kerness.

A main weakness is the failure to supply any background of the person being interviewed, especially when the person is obscure. Kenneth Anger may not be well known to a novice, so an otherwise excellent interview does not become relevant because the reader cannot link Anger's passion for occultist Edward Crowley with Anger's recurrent film themes.

"When you do an interview with Kenneth Anger, you just sort of do it for people who know who he is to some extent. We forget these things. We make a lot of mistakes that way. What we have discovered is that if we print stuff that interests us, then it is going to be pretty good. The minute you start saying, 'Well, I'm not really interested in this, but our readers are dumb and they will be interested', you get a rotten magazine. The minute you start printing stuff that bores you, then, most likely, it is going to bore your readers. The danger there, of course, is that you presume your readers all have the same background, which they don't. I find the magazine very inconsistent that way. Some of the articles explain who Alfred Hitchcock is whereas others do not explain who Kenneth Anger is."

Take One is printed on cheap, flimsy paper, with few photographs and an often sloppy, amateurish layout. But although it lacks the polished slickness of other film magazines, "Take One" is more sensitive to film as art and as mass media.

"Like a lot of things, you can do something for the wrong reason. We started using this paper, this type of design, just to save money, and having done it a couple of times, we discovered people really like it. The only people that want us to go glossy are advertising agencies which are interested in advertising glossy magazines. I do not think the people buying it care that much. Some covers are more successful than others; sometimes it looks particularly cheap."

"Take One" describes every aspect of film: its sociological effect as mass media and as an art form expressed through the film-makers and trends from Hollywood, Europe, television and the underground. The latest issue is among the best yet published and serves as a good example of typical content. It includes three views on film violence, the wit of Groucho Marx, a study of the American Negro in film and a look at the special effects in "2001: A Space Odyssey."

In surveying the entire history of "Take One", the magazine does not seem to have an evolutionary development or unified identity. A magazine need not have a unique editorial philosophy, but in the case of "Take One", this lack of unity seems to contribute to its fluctuating quality.

"The magazine has no editorial viewpoint; its writers do. The magazine shapes itself. Our writers take stands, we don't. Very often we'll print articles because we like the way they are written, then arranged in different viewpoints. In the latest issue, for example, Wally Gentleman, who did the special effects for 2001 is crapping all over 2001. Then at the back, there is a very intelligent review of the movie by John Hofess who really, really likes it. As I said, we do not have viewpoints, but we like having conflicting views."

Although the next issue of "Take One" may not approach the quality of the latest effort, anyone interested in films as art must be always aware of the journal and on the watch for its worthwhile moments. Despite its varying excellence, the reputation and circulation (from 5,000 to 15,000) continue to grow. Medjuck hopes the magazine will flourish in the United States and feels it could do so with the proper publicity.

"We have yet to get a bad press, which makes us worry a bit. Anytime we have been written up by anyone, they liked us. Anytime we have been mentioned on the radio, they liked us. Maybe you can be the first to crap on us for something."

—Jim Purdy

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