

ARTS

York grad films polished but show hard-core conservatism

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Of the seven York graduate films screened at The Science Centre this month, only one, John Detwiler and Renee Duncan's *Pleroma* could be called stylistically experimental. Yet this year's Senior Film Production course itself was "an experiment," according to Ken Dancyger, Chairman of the Film and Video Department. This "experiment" produced technically brilliant films, but graphically illustrated that freedom doesn't necessarily inspire liberalism.

The 1985-86 film production course was offered as a Senior Honours Thesis Project which made its format looser than regular production courses, thereby giving the student filmmakers more independence, Dancyger said. In previous years, third year production students would submit scripts and proposals every spring to faculty members, who would then choose three to four of them to be produced the following term. The faculty also set up crews for each film.

This year's graduating class, however, was allowed free reign on production, to the extent that, according to course director Evan Cameron "any project approvable (using available equipment) and fundable would be allowed to proceed." The screenplay criteria that Cameron followed was: are there any insurmountable flaws that a professional couldn't overcome?

Apparently not. While Cameron offered advice to the students, they were not compelled to take it, (and often, he said, didn't). "This course

teaches them to solve problem-oriented projects," he added.

Dancyger described York's film students as "ambitious and industry-oriented," which boils down to the hard-core conservatism apparently necessary in the Canadian film industry. "We're in the '80s, a very pragmatic time," Dancyger noted, "and you can't fight centrifugal force."

This "force" was in full effect at The Ontario Science Centre Screening Friday June 14. Most of the capacity audience stayed for the entire four hour programme and reception. The films, all dramatic, ranged from nine to 85 minutes in length and proved to be stylistically and contextually diversified. They were: Peter Geiger's *The Book*, Luc Chalifour's *The Inkwell II*, Mark Forler's *Passion and Gasoline*, Steven Roscoe's *Thanatos*, Susie Marucci's *Dead Fish No Tales*, John Detwiler and Renee Duncan's *Pleroma*, and Stuart Clarfield and Peter Gentile's *Welcome to the Parade*.

The Film and Video department gave each film a starting budget of \$500, and students raised the difference independently. Approximately \$80,000 was spent on these films, and one, *Welcome to the Parade*, cost "between \$18,000-20,000," said Cameron.

Dancyger describes this year's bumper crop of films as "polished and technically sophisticated...much more elaborate (than last year)." As a whole, the films stand out in their cinematography, editing, and sound editing finesse. Their greatest weakness, in most cases, lies in faulty, shallow script-writing. The scripts offered lots of instant laughs, but

lacked, with the exception of *The Book* and *Passion and Gasoline*, (both written by their directors), essential psychological insight. (*Thanatos*, written by Dave Rheame, Bernie Gauthier, and Stephen Roscoe, featuring a killer haunted and killed by the ghost of his victim, is perhaps psychologically true, but too clichéd to be considered uniquely insightful.)

Comparing Forler's *Passion and Gasoline* with Clarfield's *Welcome to the Parade* illustrates both the pros and cons of students producing "industry-oriented" films. *Passion and Gasoline*, which won a second place award in the CBC Telefest contest in April, is a tightly scripted 20-minute comic-drama. The dialogue and voice-over narration is sidesplitting in its comical undertones, while the acting of William Beddoe (Karl) and Jackie Samuda (Sophia) portrayed convincing sexual tension between these fully drawn characters.

The plot of *Passion and Gasoline* is simple: a pyromaniac (Karl) falls in love with an exotic woman (Sophia), thereby entering a perilous (and indeed fatal) love triangle. It's got pathos, love, action, death, and comedy (all the prerequisite ingredients of an industry blockbuster).

Paul Sarossy's camera rarely pauses unnecessarily; two scenes in particular are memorable, one in a huge, softly lit courtyard where Karl waltzes with his mannequin, and the final freeze frame shot of Karl in flames. Full credit to editor Peter Winninger.

Mark Forler kept both the cast and crew small, (total of nine) which enabled him to form a close-knit unified group to work with. The result is a cohesive film able to withstand the sharpest scrutiny.

Welcome to the Parade, on the other hand, runs for 85 long minutes, which could have easily been condensed to 40. The plot involves 30 characters, of which only one, Kim, (Jane Sowerby) is adequately developed.

A moralistic drama about drugs, spoiled 22 year old "kids", and insecure parents, one wonders where Stuart Clarfield got such "street-knowledge"—certainly not first-



TELEFEST AWARD WINNER: The crew of *Passion and Gasoline* with femme fatale Sophia. Standing: Paul Sarossy (left) and Mark Forler. Seated: Peter Winninger.

hand. Since when do university students who happen to smoke (gasp) marijuana and are caught in the act, get kicked out of their parent's house and immediately find themselves living adjacent to hookers and dangerously involved in a cocaine ring?

And since when do student films require in their crews "Grips" (strong men who push and lift heavy equipment, which is usually done by student producers themselves) and "Craft Services" (food supplied by mom or sis or auntie). This, of

course, is trivial criticism, but in fact, it is only a small example of the pretension reeking from the *Parade*.

Why did Clarfield and Gentile attempt such a production? Well, last year we did a 12 minute film, and a 15 minute film," Clarfield said. "That's a total of 27 minutes of film time. So we decided we could go even longer. It's a very good little movie," Cameron stated, "and when they go out (into the industry), they'll have their feet on the ground." Firmly entrenched, one might add.



Heavy metal

York's campus is ideal for outdoor art exhibits, according to Art Gallery of York University director Elizabeth McLuhan. Pictured here is a series of sculptures by Canadian artist Jeffrey Rubinoff, guest-curated by David Burnett. In late August, the AGYU will present another outdoor exhibit—sculptor Louis Stokes' "Not Really Trees." Stokes works solely with organic materials.



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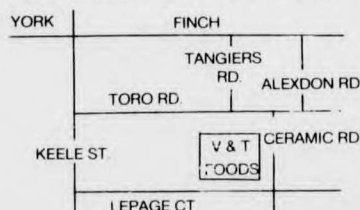
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