

Charming film documents life Precocious adults make precious film

7 UP
14 UP
21 UP
AND...
28 UP!

By ALEX PATTERSON

28 UP is a title which makes little sense until explained. It is the name of a "longitudinal documentary" begun in the early 1960's by England's Granada Television following the progress (or regress) of a group of randomly-selected children from all walks of British life.

The first installment, in 1963, was called *7 Up*, when the 10 boys and four girls (which probably seemed like a fair representation of the sexes back then) were seven. There have been updates every seven years since, as the film's subjects have grown from schoolchildren through adolescence to adulthood, comparing and contrasting what they had said and thought seven years' prior with their present situation. This, the fourth episode in the series, is showing at the Bloor and Revue Cinemas for a week apiece before beginning an indefinite run at the Carleton.

What began as a one-time special for Granada—the people who bring us that other celebration of Britain's

unsung heroes, *Coronation Street*—is a precious anthropological document and an endlessly watchable entertainment. With a minimum of assistance in the way of voice-over narration, *28 Up* lets its subjects speak for themselves. And what a lot they tell us; not only about their personal histories, but also about post-war English life and about human nature. Frequently the audience roars with the uncomfortable laughter of self-recognition, as the interviewees contradict everything they had said at younger stages of their development.

The 14 children were chosen so as to give a representative picture of England's class structure: they range from Simon, a black orphan, to a trio of insufferably smug preppies who at seven predict with perfect accuracy their educational futures at Oxbridge. In between are a Cockney cabbie, three working class women who marry early, a bricklayer who emigrates to Australia, a physicist who emigrates to Wisconsin, and a very sad case named Neil. At seven and fourteen Neil is bright and articulate. At 21 he is squatting in an abandoned house and is freshly dropped out of university. At 28 he is a kind of philosophical tramp, wandering the highways of the UK, head shaven, living off welfare between odd jobs. The filmmakers devote a lot of screen time to this miserable wretch, this twisted husk of his former self, because they recognize that his is a compelling story. He is the most reflective of all the cases (possible because he has had the most time to think about it while the others have been getting on with their careers) and is also the most eloquent of the bunch.

Director Michael Apted (*Coal Miner's Daughter*, *Bring on the Night*) has exercised judicious skill in the assembling of his footage. He knows—with a couple of exceptions—just how long a viewer would want to spend with each of his "stars." At two-and-a-quarter hours, *28 Up* is just a trifle long; one or two of the interviews could be trimmed of some of their less pertinent information, but on the whole the respondents are interesting and concise in their answers. Fortune has been kind to Apted in that not only are some of the people remarkably insightful and enlightening, they are also all still *alive*. None of them have died or come to any physical grief during the span of the movie's 21 years. (However, two of the aristo-sophisto brats refused to be interviewed at 28, one saying that he had "nothing to add" to what he said at 21.)

Some of the accents are quite thick, a problem aggravated by on-location sound recording. It is only in the black-and-white flashbacks to 1963, though, that this poses any major threat to comprehension. The ear compensates for this sort of thing within a few minutes, much as the eyes adjust to darkness. The pronunciations, sometimes odd-sounding to the Canadian ear, should not stand as a barrier to anyone who wishes to see this funny, charming, generous, unique movie. In a country where a dropped H* can ruin a child's chances of success later in life, these dialects are an integral part of the film. *28 Up* is one not to be missed; it will leave you wishing the next seven years will pass quickly so that we will be able to observe the encroachment of middle age in *35 Up*.



That was us, this is us: Documentary film series won't let these people go as it follows the lives of 14 people at seven year intervals. No. 4 hits the spot.

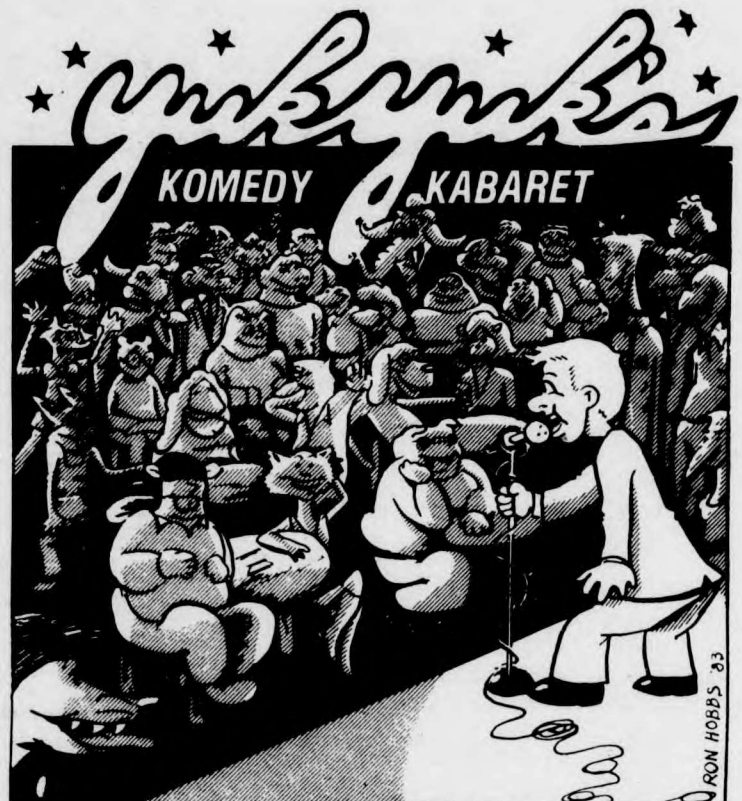
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