

# "Modern Age" examines the realities of the street

By ROSLYN ANGEL

The reality of teenage life on the streets is the main issue dealt with in "Modern Age," an independent video by the Toronto based group News From The Roof in collaboration with newly formed Iris Productions. The group submitted their video to the Casby Music Awards to be held on October 13 at RPM.

Stephen Scott and Joseph Paterson, the video's director and production manager respectively, are both graduates of York University. In addition, Peter Jacobs, the video's cinematographer, is in his last year at York in the Faculty of Fine Arts.

Scott and Paterson have recently formed Iris Productions, an independent production company. The company's first project is a one-hour documentary examining the teenage runaway situation and its solutions. Bernard Frazer, the singer/songwriter of "Modern Age," will also be

involved in the documentary. Frazer expressed a determination to understand why these kids run away and "what is lacking in their lives."

Paterson expressed his concern regarding the AIDS issue. "These



kids are barely teenagers, they don't know anything about condoms." Paterson feels that teen male prostitutes are at a high risk for AIDS because of their lack of education regarding protection. The documentary, Paterson hopes, will make peo-

ple more aware of these issues and help them come to terms with "the ugly reality of life on the streets."

"Modern Age" focuses on a 15-year-old girl named Hope who runs away from her well-to-do family and must face the consequences. She encounters the wrong crowd and is persuaded to become a teenage prostitute. Hope is introduced to the horrors and realities of street life; "a junky in an alley shooting up and rent boys being picked up by pimps," as described by Frazer. Frazer hopes that the video will discourage teens from running away by raising their awareness and promoting discussion amongst themselves and their families.

Frazer has been working closely with various social agencies to raise the consciousness of teens about the reality of the streets. On August 18 and 19, 1988 at the Eaton Centre, an awareness campaign was held by

Oolagen Community Services with the aid of the video and its creators.

Oolagen is a centre which offers therapy to troubled youths and their families. Experienced social workers from Oolagen showed "Modern Age" throughout the afternoon and handed out pamphlets to all who were interested. Frazer felt that response to the video was good and said that people were "keen to understand what we were doing." He was amazed that teens know so very little about the consequences of living in the downtown streets and how dirty it actually is.

Frazer is now working with Bob Engel, the director of Oolagen, to create a programme in the high schools which will educate teens about the problems of running away. If the program is approved by the Ministry of Education, Engel will not only speak to the high schools but also show "Modern Age."

"Modern Age" was written by Frazer and Garth Baker. The video is three minutes and 38 seconds long and it was filmed both at York University and downtown Toronto. Frazer said, "We wanted to be as realistic as possible," therefore going downtown — to the heart of the issue — fit the purpose.

The video, costing \$5,000, was financially backed by Frazer and the other creators and took roughly six to seven months to produce. York University donated its facilities and some equipment to the group.

When asked what the video's chances are in the Casby Awards, Frazer said that "it is difficult to say because we are not very well known" and the award is voted by the people.

Frazer feels that their biggest threat is The Shuffle Demons because they are a "household word" whereas News From The Roof is not, "yet."

## Video reveals disturbing news from Toronto band

By MARK LEVINE

News From The Roof may have a winner on their hands. The Toronto-based rock band, headed by Bernard Frazer and Garth Baker, was a finalist last year in CFNY's Great Ontario Talent Search Contest and the future looks even better. With their new song "Modern Age," they just might have pushed all the necessary buttons to guarantee themselves commercial success in the Canadian rock market.

The song alone is enough to attract one's attention. It is about vulnerable teenagers that are drawn into the dreary and dangerous world of life on the streets in the 1980s. But rather than sending a false message of optimism, the song pleads for an explanation as to why teens are drawn into street life. An explanation, however, is not given, leaving

us to our own conclusions that are to its abrupt end.

The sound and style of "Modern Age" not only adds to the sense of urgency and danger surrounding street kids, but enhances that message and grows with it. The music starts slowly but picks up with a fast-paced rhythm and numerous jarring and dissonant chords. This creates an uncomfortable sense of constant motion and discord that helps to draw the listener into the mood of the streets.

"Modern Age," the video, directed by Stephen Scott and produced at York University's Film and Video Department, has already enjoyed a certain amount of success, receiving support from MuchMusic. Youth support groups such as Oolagen Community Services and the Inner City Youth Programme have used the video as an educational tool



### NEWS FROM THE ROOF

as well. Possibly the best recognition it has received is its nomination for a 1988 Casby Music Award as Best Independent Video.

Although it did take a number of viewings to warm up to it, the video for "Modern Age" is actually better than many of the high-gloss, big-budget productions on most of the commercial video programmes. Its documentary style follows a young girl (ironically named Hope, played

by Joy Learn) from her comfortable home to her introduction to the streets, which includes drugs and prostitution.

One especially powerful sequence finds Hope in a deserted parking garage getting into a car with a sinister middle-aged man. She looks innocent and frightened as he puts his hand to her face, then drops it below the view of the camera. This scene cuts to Hope's parents, her father on the telephone with his hand on her mother's in consolation. The juxtaposition of these two scenes is disturbing and would seem to be the focus of the "street life fears vs. the comfort of life at home" theme.

The closing scene makes "Modern Age" stand out. It begins with a washed-out, grainy shot of the singer

(Frazer) against a background of newspaper clippings about sex and violence on the streets. The camera pans slowly back to reveal that the images are on a television screen in an empty living-room. (Could it be that these images of the street are seen every day but they are ignored or tuned out?) The television turns off while the singer is in mid-sentence and the room is left in dead silence for the final few seconds of the video.

"Modern Age," however, is not without its flaws. For one thing, the lyrics are nasal at times and nearly impossible to understand. Also, the photography in the video (by Peter Jacobs) is often too clean and bright. Perhaps, more dark and gray could have been employed to create a stronger sense of mystery and doom.

Still, this video has a lot going for it: intelligent, catchy music and thought-provoking lyrics. But it is the visual images that stand out most of all and will work to the song's commercial advantage. As in so many of today's popular songs, it will probably be the video that passes on the message of the "Modern Age."

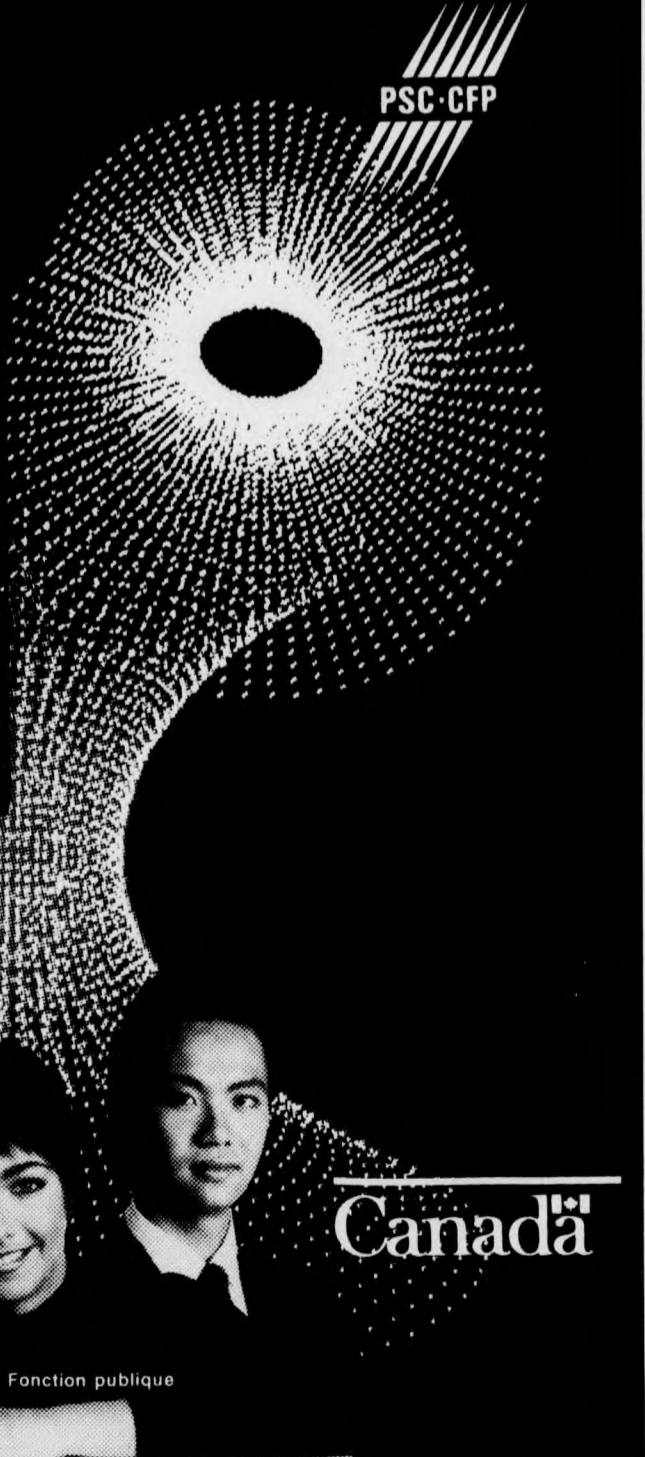
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