

Canadian film wins world-wide acclaim

Mon Oncle Antoine - How good is it?

By LLOYD CHESLEY

I'm not really sure what I want to say about this film, since it has gained greater critical acclaim than any other Canadian feature, here at home anyway. It had a hard time finding a theatre that would run it, and I'm not sure if it will get foreign distribution, except that they've managed to have it entered in the Oscars. But how good is it?

Claude Jutra made the film. He is one of many French Canadian film-makers (sometimes I think they outnumber the English by at least a hundred to one), but he doesn't make cheap exploitation films. In this film he has painted a portrait of a small Quebec village, looking at it through the eyes of a teen-ager growing up there.

The film is filled with characters. There is the boy and the uncle he lives with, the uncle of the title. There is his wife, the boy's aunt, and his assistant, her lover, if briefly. There is the young girl who works for and lives with them. There is an itinerant farmer who can't seem to find his place, and his wife and many children who have to wait with him while he half-heartedly tries.

If I've bored you or lost you with all those characters, I might point out that that is how I reacted to the film. Despite its title I really don't know who it was all about. The uncle is in fact one of the weakest characters. I have no real sense of seeing things through the eyes of the boy and everyone else seems peripheral or supporting. There is a real lack in the screenplay.

I also wasn't sure of the tone of the film. All I felt was heavy, but I didn't know why. The humor comes rarely and quietly and all in all I got the impression that it was supposed to

be a tragedy, but I couldn't see it.

There is a certain sense of nostalgia in the film. I have heard it said that the film takes place in the forties, but I saw very little evidence.

In fact the film lacks any type of unity at all. It gives the effect of a large, broad, nothing. In total, that is.

Taken part by part, a lot more can be said. The film has many good moments, and it must be remembered that in the first analysis a film is a series of moments. No art depends more on the moment in passing. There can be no waiting in a film and there is certainly no time for reflection. You can't put it down, even if you want to.

And it does have many strong moments, such as when the boy puts his hand on the girl's breast, a very silent, poignant moment; or when the corpse of a boy is put in a coffin that is too short and they must bend the neck to fit him in; the jibe at English bosses as the owner of the mill that supports the town refuses a wage increase at Christmas, bus rides in a carriage through town tossing little trinkets to the people; and the triumph when the boy throws a snowball and sends the boss' horse reeling.

It bored me. I must admit that. But at times it did touch me, too. Personally I am angry at the slighting Rip-Off has received and puzzled by the acknowledgment for Mon Oncle Antoine. It is not the best Canadian film ever, nor does it show as much promise for Jutra's crew as Shebib's has shown with Rip-Off. But it is nice and allows us a view at a society within our own country that we really know nothing about.



Benoit is the boy who comes of age in *Mon Oncle Antoine*.

McLaughlin's Songs from the Street - fine pieces

By STEVE GELLER

Murray McLaughlin; Songs From The Street (True North Records TN4). Murray McLaughlin has received some recognition over the past few years primarily because of a few songs that he had written for other artists. Child's Song is probably the best known. This was recorded by Tom Rush two albums ago. So magnetic and filled with so much feeling was Child's Song that Rush used it as his final encore number at concerts.

On Songs From The Street, Child's Song is just one of many fine compositions that McLaughlin has decided to record. Most of the other cuts were written after Child's Song and McLaughlin seems to have moved into a down-home type of country style typified by cuts such as: Jesus Please Don't Save Me (Till I Die), and Honkey Red. Other songs such as Sixteen Lanes of Highway and I Just Get Older reveal evidence of McLaughlin's Canadian Heritage

without affording him a stereotyped Canadian sound image.

Grand Funk: E. Pluribus Funk (Capitol Records SW-853). This is Grand Funk's most commercial, least meaningful, most pretentious album yet. It offers no new insight into what the group has been musically developing — if anything. It is unfortunate indeed, when a group gets popular enough to realize that whatever they release is going to sell. Unsubtle ties like People Let's Stop the War and Save the Land are two prime examples of Grand Funk's state of nowhere-ness on their latest album.

The Band: Cahoots (Capitol Records SMAS-651). With Cahoots, it has become apparent that The Band have definitely changed their approach somewhat. Their first two albums seemed to make it because of an absolute portrayal of a country-gospel trend of thought. This is still the underlying premise to their new material but there is a

definite trend by The Band to put a little more "roll" into their sound as well as to experiment with recording techniques.

While J.R. Robertson's compositions are by no means below par, it is the production on the album that makes Cahoots the success that it is. Life is a Carnival, on a half-decent stereo set sounds completely different from the one dimensional sound that the everyday kitchen table or car radio puts out. Also on the album is a Dylan tune — When I Paint My Masterpiece — as well as a Robertson-Van Morrison collaboration called 4 percent Pantomime.

Five Man Electrical Band: Coming of Age (Polydor 2424-047). This album includes their hit single Absolutely Right. Unfortunately most of the remainder of the album resembles the commercial format of this meagre Canadian band. That's not to imply that com-

mercialism is bad just because it is what it is; rather, the Five Man Electrical Band do what they do poorly and have firmly established themselves as being truly a fifth-rate group.

The Firesign Theatre: I Think We're All Bozos On This Bus (Columbia C30737). What can I say? The Firesign Theatre's latest album

is just as berserk as ever. This time they meander through a "Fair of the Future" where anything goes — including their interpretations of how our great world began.

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