



The dvd titled CHILDREN AT PLAY from The National Film Board of Canada contains four short animations suitable for all ages. They are ideal for kindergarten and primary age students. Two of them are essential viewing for youngsters (and their parents): WIND and THE ANIMAL MOVIE.

At the top of the dvd menu is WIND.

Canada 1972 Director: Ron Tunis color 9 ½ minutes

17 of a possible 20 points

1/2 of a possible **

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

- Producer: Rene Jodoin
- 2 Director: Ron Tunis*
- 1 Editor: Yves Leduc
- 2 Camera: Pierre Provost, Simon Leblanc, Cameron Gaul
- 2 Lighting
- 0 Written by: Rene Jodoin
- 2 Visual Design
- 2 Animation
- 2 Sound: Pierre Brault*
- 2 Ambience
- 2 Creativity

17 points

WIND explores the sounds and effects of that invisible power that seems both playful and awesome to a preschool child, such as the central visible character of this film. Using electronic music permits the fullest possible range of sonic registers for the gusty overlord that pushes, snatches, buffets and overturns whatever it pleases. Like the child, wind seems to have no overall plan or foresight.

Unpredictable, apparently disembodied, coming from an unidentifiable source and moving to a distant horizon, it exerts a magical influence. The youngster is inclined to treat it alternately as playmate or boss, depending on the roughness of its impact. Viewers can judge speed and direction by movement of objects on the screen as they are caressed, toppled or displaced by a capricious weather wizard. Aside from chucklings of delight and occasional ejaculations of astonishment, there are no human vocalizations for child listeners to decode. Pierre Brault's soundscape harmonizes perfectly with a constantly shifting color palette onscreen to create an almost kaleidoscopic synthesis of tones and shadings. WIND could well serve as an introduction to the abstract world of Oskar Fischinger, though films such as MOTION PAINTING NO. 1 incorporate the additional element of organized music.

Second on the dvd is SEA DREAM.

Canada 1979 Director: Ellen Besen color 5 ½ minutes

9 of a possible 20 points

** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

Producer: Margaret Pettigrew

1 Director: Ellen Besen

1 Editor

2 Camera: Simon Leblanc

1 Lighting

0 Written by: Margaret Pettigrew based on a poem by Debra Bojman

1 Music: Beverly Glenn-Copeland, Sharon Smith

1 Production Design: Ellen Besen

1 Animation: Bill Speers, Ellen Besen

0 Sound: Jacqueline Newell, Peter Strobl and Adrian Croll

1 Creativity

9 points

The second film on the CHILDREN AT PLAY dvd features a first-person young girl narrator, who explains that she escapes from embarrassments of stains, toothpaste waste and a common stamp mistakenly identified as a valuable rarity by dreaming of diving into the sea. In a nightgown! While underwater she participates in a tea party with an amiable octopus, who also partners her in baseball, golf and various board games, including checkers. With its octet of tentacles, the syringe-like denizen of the deep makes a formidable opponent. Growing tired of sports, dancing, and swimming, the human visitor is treated to stories of ghosts, pirates and remote lands encountered only in fairy tales. It seems the octopus has convenient access to a library. At the end of a day spent underwater, the girl attempts to swim back up to the surface, but is pushed back down by a powerful ocean current or tide. This gives her marine host an opportunity to wrap its guest in a comforting manifold embrace of farewell. Told in rhyming couplets, with jazzy music in Vince Guaraldi mode and a sprinkling of reggae rhythms, SEA DREAM is a cool aquamarine excursion into a fantasy world curiously devoid of mermaids. Its most disappointing flaw is listener inability to distinguish portions of murmured monologue from the anonymous storyteller. Deliberately made far more appealing to young girls than to boys, SEA DREAM is designed to captivate the attention of children left uninvolved or repulsed by the frisky

structurelessness of WIND. Narration is spoken by Yvanna Kroitor, with text deriving from Debra Bojman's poem. Camera mobility and animation is satisfactory. Children should have no difficulty following the story line visually.

Next offering on the dvd is AVEC GRAND-MERE (WITH GRANDMA) from the Francophone area of Canada.

Canada 1999 wordless Director: Francoise Hartmann 9 ½ minutes

12 of a possible 20 points

*** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points

Producers: Marcy Page, Barrie Angus McLean

1 Director: Francoise Hartmann

1 Editor

1 Camera: Pierre Landry

1 Lighting

1 Written by: Marcy Page and Barrie Angus McLean

1 Production Design

1 Animation: Francoise Hartmann, Louise Johnson and Jodi Shuster

2 Music: Judith Gruber-Stitzer Music Recording: Geoffrey Mitchell

2 Sound: Judith Gruber-Stitzer, Cory Rizos, Monique Vezina, Shelly Craig and Jean-Paul Vialard

1 Creativity

12 points

A small red-haired girl is left behind with her maternal grandmother as parents sail off on a month-long excursion. We viewers are transported to Francophone Canada. Parisian boulevard music plays on the soundtrack. Grandmother is bespectacled, tolerant, pleased to look after what appears to be a solitary grandchild. She lives in a two-story Victorian mansion with wooden shutters, a place somewhat foreboding to the disconsolate guest, who must find it inhospitably antiquated. Separation from mother and father couple with incessant rain to further dampen her spirits. But eventually a discovery is made. Grandma has a massive steamer trunk upstairs with just the right kind of old clothes for dressing up. High heels, flowery hat, and trailing dress transform her into a stylish "adult" lady.

Later on, senior and junior share a survey of yesteryear photos in Grandmother's well-preserved album. The younger peruser is entertained, surprised to see her mother looking much like herself, but in late Victorian children's clothes. Her imagination transforms a picture of Mom with a Mountie into a train rattling its way through virgin forests and expansive plains thronged with buffalo. Indian tepees occupy slender valleys. Snow-crested peaks provide a majestically scenic backdrop.

Done with looking at photos, the girl amuses herself by liberating Grandmother's pet bird from its cage. Gingerly, she strokes its feathers as the avian balances on an extended finger. Trying to escape from possessive benefactress, the bird wings up to a perch in an overhead chandelier, inadvertently amusing the child below.

Later, we see Grandma assisting the girl as she pulls on a nightgown and gets tucked into bed, where dreams of a whale, elk, duck and owl successively present themselves. Grandma picks up a teddy bear

that might have once belonged to the girl's mother and gently pushes it into her hands. It apparently still delivers reassurance and warmth.

Further bonding occurs on yet another day, as the girl prepares batter under Grandmother's supervision. An explanation is given of how long parents will be out at sea, as calendar pages flip rapidly from August 1st to September 2nd. At last absent guardians return. Just in time to celebrate their daughter's seventh birthday with appropriate cake and candles. The family is reunited in a final traditional celebration, giving AVEC GRANDMERE a hearteningly happy conclusion.

Unobtrusive as its focal character, the score by Judith Gruber-Stitzer incorporates some stride piano to suggest an earlier period when Mother was a small child. There is just a suggestion of bittersweetness in the principal theme, which fits well with the girl's initial reactions to rain and parental departure. The sound design, also created by Judith Gruber-Stitzer, captures all the minor resonances and nuances of the protagonist's adjustment to a novel environment, employing delicate humor rather than boisterous expressionism. In fact, it reinforces the impressionistic imagery of the art, but never to the extent of blurring events or characters into a welter of disfigurements. Lighting is appropriately subdued. Though editing pace is slow, it does not deteriorate into sluggishness. Just as the protagonist's exploration of her new surroundings is gradual and tentative, so is the movement of scenes. The story itself is just a gradual accumulation of mundane occurrences that pass unremarked by adults, but seem impressively memorable to their less experienced offspring.

AVEC GRANDMERE is a richly atmospheric film for families to share together, if their younger members happen to be preteen females. But it is an irresistible invitation to boredom for male counterparts who favor more action and broader humor.

At the bottom of the dvd menu is THE ANIMAL MOVIE.

Canada 1966 Co-Directors: Ron Tunis and Grant Munro wordless color 9 ¾ minutes
15 of a possible 20 points **** of a possible *****

Points

Producer: Sidney Goldsmith
2 Co-Directors: Ron Tunis, Grant Munro
1 Editor
2 Camera: Jacques Jarry
1 Lighting
0 Written by
1 Production Design
2 Music: Pierre Brault, Kathleen Shannon and Malca Gillson
2 Animation: Grant Munro, Ron Tunis
2 Sound: Pierre Brault, Kathleen Shannon, Malca Gillson, Ron Alexander and Roger Lamoureux
2 Creativity
15 points

In the beginning, there was a concept of making a traditional explanatory documentary, probably with narration, to explain animal movements. That idea never came to fruition, despite years of consideration and planning by employees of The National Film Board of Canada. Finally, a far more

creative solution to the problem was outlined. Co-Directors Ron Tunis and Grant Munro began to experiment with an animated presentation of a preschool boy imitating motions of various popular, readily identifiable wildlife exemplars. Injecting humor and eliminating all speech, they devised a child-friendly entertainment that nonetheless manages to encourage exercise and highlight species locomotion. Opening with a marching theme played by drums and kazoos, THE ANIMAL MOVIE portrays its theme through a young boy's encounters with various animals, successively free-swinging arboreal monkey, wild horse, slithery garter snake, graceful bird, propulsive grasshopper, and leaping dolphin. When the child attempts to ape the simian, he finds it impossible to reproduce aerial swings from one tree branch to another. Ruddy-maned equine, represented by pizzicato strings as it gallops, is far too speedy for the copycatting youngster. Wriggling like a tickling serpent, the protagonist soon tires himself out (and is probably experiencing a bruised belly). Snaring his attention next is a white bird, represented by piano and flute, with exquisitely-shaped alea. The aerialist's flutters can be mimicked successfully, but not its soaring flights.

When the dovelike creature lands and attempts to capture a grasshopper, the spectator is pleasantly encouraged. He, too, can hop. But mimicry leads him first into a reedy marsh, then directly into what looks like a pond, but must actually constitute part of an estuary. For what should appear next but a leaping porpoise. That is impossible to simulate. After taking a ride on the creature's back, the gleeful youngster is left alone underwater. Holding his breath, he fishtails to the surface. A distant speck attracts attention. The miniscule object near the horizon zooms closer, materializing into a combination hydrofoil / flying saucer. Opening its dome, the machine's operator invites his astonished beholder inside. Apparently the device also serves as an immersible. For it then dives down into the ocean, permitting a guided tour of marine life. As the navigator explains to his guest how the craft travels, he tilts it upward. The submarine zips up to and beyond the limit of water and ascends into the air, converting itself into a kind of aircraft. Off go two explorers through banks of clouds as the film closes.

Utilizing simple line animation, extensive patches of empty white spaces and sparse visual details, THE ANIMAL MOVIE manages to be both educational and fun. While its plot is completely incredible, realistic depiction of youthful vigor, optimism, grunts, hummings and gigglings should succeed in luring child viewers into a delightful fantasy world. Even little girls may find the film utterly irresistible.

Though there are no bonus features on this dvd, it is strongly recommended as an introduction to the animation work of The National Film Board of Canada. A real treat for small, adventurous viewers.



JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY is a second LVCA dvd donation for June, 2013 to the Ligonier Valley Library.

New Yorker Video Raven Films United States 1958 Producer: Bert Stern color 82 minutes
 12 of a possible 20 points *** of a possible *****

*indicates outstanding performance or technical achievement

Points

- 2 Producer: Bert Stern
- 0 Editor: Aram Avakian
- 2 Cinematography / Cameras: Bert Stern*, Ray Phelan*, Courtney Hafela*
- 0 Lighting: Bert Stern, George Avakian
- 0 Script: Arnold Perl, Albert D'Annibale
- 2 Music: Ben Bernie / Maceo Pinkard, Achille Baquet? / Jack Carey? / Punch Miller? / Eddie Edwards? / Nick LaRocca? / Henry Ragas? / Tony Sbarbaro? / Larry Shields? / Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe?, Chuck Berry, Hoagy Carmichael, Jimmy Giuffre, Chico Hamilton, Albert Hay Malotte, Gerald Marks, Thelonious Monk, Gerry Mulligan, Johnny Richards / Sonny Stitt, Vincent Youmans, others NOTE: The composition credits of "TIGER RAG" are widely disputed, thus the question marks concerning possible authors.

2 Sound: Elliott Gruskin*

2 Ambience

2 Creativity

2 Insightfulness

12 points

Not only is JAZZ FOR A SUMMER'S DAY the first feature-length music festival film, it is unquestionably the greatest jazz film yet made. This is due to a combination of superior performances, remarkably clement weather, masterful still photography and mostly excellent music. Its chief drawbacks are the

stingy selection of jazz performers, over-reliance on artificial cutaway shots, and the fragmentary recordings of some individual musical numbers.

Bert Stern made the film as an attempt to bridge from still advertising photography to feature filmmaking. He failed to achieve that goal. JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY remains his sole completed theatrical feature.

Critical to its success was the laborious shaping work of editor Aram Avakian, who sloughed through dozens of hours of film and sound recording to fashion something coherent, synchronized and interesting. Stern himself was responsible for the extraneous cutaway shots of supposed audience reactions and non-concert activities. Though these are photogenic, many are utterly irrelevant to the topic at hand. Some, like rooftop dancers and beer guzzlers, are misleading, having been photographed later in the state of New York. Thus they are no indicators of behavior at Newport, Rhode Island, site of the actual jazz festival.

On the other hand, performances are live, unrehearsed and accurate right down to mumbled banter between Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden and spontaneous vibes playing by Dinah Washington, who inserts herself nearly catastrophically as an instrumentalist during the performance of Gerald Marks's "All of Me."

Many critics have justifiably decried Stern's cutaways to yachts and racing reports during the playing of Thelonious Monk's composition "Blue Monk" as tacky and disrespectful. It is rude, and probably the result of producer aversion to pianistic dissonances. Stern obviously preferred to focus on something airy and upbeat, which sailboats and sun-speckled waves provided. By referencing "a summer's day" in the film title, he warded off potential carping. Or hoped to. The America's Cup shots could then be defended as reinforcing aestival atmosphere. Monk's introspective, downbeat music did not fit the production agenda of cheerful, open-air festivity that Stern planned to convey with his finished film. Since Thelonious was a Columbia recording artist at that point, George Avakian could obtain clearance for his performance, thus saddling his artistic partner with an unphotogenic keyboard player whose sluggish, relatively crabbed fingerings offered no visual flashiness to lure viewers. Stern wanted a Liberace, but was handed jazz's version of Charles Ives instead.

Lighting is somewhat of a problem, though George Avakian is not responsible for its shortcomings. Stern's decision to shoot into the sun at magic hour and directly at overhead stage lights during night presentations results in smears and glares that significantly detract from both music and musician, while adding nothing to ambience. This might pass muster as 1950s avant-garde still photography, but it resembles amateur home movie ineptitude in a theatrical feature. Inexperience and misguided priorities at times prevent the film from attaining desired timeless masterpiece status.

As documentation of a specific time and place, JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY is somewhat disappointingly inconsistent. A photographer's instinct to establish identifiable focal references, such as a Vogue model wearing a red sweater, clashes with the spontaneity of children disporting themselves on lawns and merry-go-round. Many artists on stage appear surprisingly formal in blazers, ties, white gloves and flowery hats. Perhaps they were determined to present themselves as serious, talented individuals and groups of comparable skill with classical counterparts. Or maybe they just wished to distance themselves from the more relaxed attire of country and folk musicians. In the audiences, we see interminglings of black and white visitors. But are these actual festival attendees, or posed groupings

shot later in a different state? Is the producer stacking the deck to communicate a social message actual footage from Newport would contradict?

What can be determined for sure is the integration onstage of black and white jazzmen. Whether this was preprogrammed by festival manager George Wein or simply resulting from independent selection of group members, it is clearly a harbinger of America's future. Models of interracial harmony are both visible and audible. No wonder Southern theaters boycotted the movie.

Structurally, the overriding design is a movement from morning daylight at sea to inky midnight on land. Temperatures climb, peak, then drop off to relaxing coolness. Since festival planners failed to schedule a fireworks display, July 4th is evidenced only obliquely, much to photographer Stern's frustration. What was generated onstage would have to suffice for pyrotechnics. In a world still tentative about accepting rock and roll's hammering beats and blatant self-advertisement, it sufficed.

Still, Newport's organizers didn't want to appear too reactionary. So they included Chuck Berry, with accompanying electric guitar and duck walk. Mahalia Jackson received an invitation also, as did Ray Charles and his scandalous Raelettes. Even Big Maybelle was accepted, as a token blues artist, though her jazz credentials were nil. Something for everyone must have been the operative motto when choosing a final lineup.

Musical peaks of the film are Anita O'Day scatting through "Tea for Two," Chico Hamilton exercising incredible dynamic restraint and variation on "Blue Sands," Louis Armstrong's virtuoso trumpet fingerings in "Tiger Rag" and Mahalia Jackson's profoundly spiritual rendering of Albert Hay Malotte's arrangement of "The Lord's Prayer," delivered just after midnight on Sunday, July 7th. According to Stern, George Wein commanded that no photographs were to be taken during that Day 3 finale in order to preserve its pious character. The filmmaker defied the ban, resulting in one of the most dramatic and enduring recordings of an American hymn ever.

Below is a list of musical numbers auditors of JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY will encounter, based on their order in the film.

1. "The Train and the River" Music of Jimmy Giuffre
2. "Blue Monk" Music of Thelonious Monk
3. "Loose Walk" Music of Johnny Richards and Sonny Stitt
4. "Sweet Georgia Brown" Music of Ben Bernie and Maceo Pinkard
5. "Tea For Two" Music of Vincent Youmans
6. "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home?" Music of Hughie Cannon
7. "O Tannenbaum" Music of a 16th Century anonymous German
8. "Rondo" or "George in Brazil" (variously identified) Music of George Shearing
9. "All of Me" Music of Gerald Marks
10. "Catch As Catch Can" Music of Gerry Mulligan
11. "I Ain't Mad At You" Music: Traditional blues
12. "Sweet Little Sixteen" Music of Chuck Berry
13. "Blue Sands" Music of Chico Hamilton
14. "Up a Lazy River" Music of Hoagy Carmichael
15. "Tiger Rag" Music authorship debated. The following individuals all have been proposed as composers / co-composers: Achille Baquet, Jack Carey and Punch Miller, Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe, Eddie Edwards-Nick LaRocca-Henry Ragas-Tony Sbarbaro-Larry Shields

16. "Rockin' Chair" Music of Hoagy Carmichael
17. "When the Saints Go Marching In" Traditional jazz music
18. "Walk All Over God's Heaven" / "Didn't It Rain?" Traditional spirituals
19. "The Lord's Prayer" Music of Albert Hay Malotte
20. "Maryland, My Maryland" See Item 7 above.

Throughout the motion picture at intervals you will see and hear a sextet from Yale University performing in a variety of most unlikely, picturesque places. This jazz group is Eli's Chosen Six, deriving their moniker from Elihu Yale, donor who provided money to build the cited school.

JAZZ ON A SUMMER'S DAY is of considerable historical and musical interest. It is highly recommended for teens and adults. But necking scenes, smoking, reckless motoring, beer parties and potentially hazardous rooftop dancing make the film unsuitable for preteens.

DVD bonuses include a half-hour documentary on making the film, a playlist of performers who appeared at the 1958 Newport Jazz festival, background information on highlights of Bert Stern's career, and the 1958 America's Cup Trials, individual performance videos, and a section of Reflections by Chuck Berry, Thelonious Monk, Big Maybelle and Sonny Stitt. Most fascinating is the playlist. Why were Charles Mingus, Oscar Peterson, Lambert-Hendricks-Ross, Mel Torme, Ornette Coleman, Willie Colon, Tito Puente, McCoy Tyner, Dizzy Gillespie and Earl "Fatha" Hines not present?

Bert Stern planned to make a second, similar film from unused footage shot for this one. It never materialized. Is the time ripe for it now?

If you think so, please notify kinoken@ligoniervalleycinemaassociation.net . Perhaps the LVCA can begin a petition for such a production. Jazz lovers of America, unite!

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