

# SHORT TAKES

BY TOM MCSORLEY



## The Truth about Head

2003 13m *p/d* Dale Heslip, *sc* Dale Heslip, Andrew Manson, *pb* André Pienaar, *ed* Bruce Copeman; *with* Katherine Ashby, Joshua Buckle, Quancetia Hamilton, Bruce Hunter.

From the “cowards, bullies and clowns” (as critic Robert Fothergill famously described them), to the benumbed figures trapped in the technological murk of the 1980s, to the amnesiac masculine mists of Guy Maddin and Robert Lepage, the Canadian cinematic male has always been somehow incomplete or deficient, if not downright gravely wounded. Well, gentlemen, you’ve met your match. Please welcome Toronto filmmaker Dale Heslip’s Ed to the sad fraternity. Ed, you see, is just a head, a man without a body. But he’s got gumption. The operator of a shabby freak show, Ed travels the countryside with his Felliniesque crew trying to raise money to obtain a body. In Heslip’s imaginative and capable hands, *The Truth about Head* (a prize winner at the 42nd Critics’ Week in Cannes 2003) is an unsentimental tale of one man’s peculiar search for acceptance. Its impressive, often striking visual design and broad, bawdy humour could best be described as an offbeat combination of Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam and Wayne and Shuster. While not entirely successful—the film occasionally pushes its idiosyncrasy too far—*The Truth about Head*’s dark sensibility and salty partial protagonist make it a memorable addition to Canadian cinema’s twisted portrait gallery of maladroit males.

## Saskatchewan Part 2

2003 13m *prod* One Ton Ant Moving Images, *p* Tobi Lampard, *d/pb/ed* Brian Stockton, *mus* The Supers.

Before its name was changed to Regina, Saskatchewan’s capital city and home to the RCMP used to be known as “Pile of Bones.” This second instalment in Brian Stockton’s personalized documentary–cum–diary film cycle, *Saskatchewan Part 2* (subtitled *The Epic Story of My Life Part 2, Ages 2–5. That’s My Wonderful Town*) is a wry, observant, miniature masterpiece about that fabled place on the prairies where he was raised. With its brilliant mélange of contemporary footage, archival photos, historical facts and figures, home movies and witty re-enactments of his kindergarten days (featuring a winning appearance by Keaton L. Stockton, the filmmaker’s son), Stockton nimbly weaves together rich, alternating tones of wistful nostalgia, gentle derision and self-deprecation. Rendered in luminous and intelligently utilized 35–mm cinemascope, *Saskatchewan Part 2* both embodies and analyzes the complex nature of nostalgia and the unexpected intersections of civic history and personal reminiscence. Concluding with a haunting Wilco–esque reinterpretation of Regina’s 1970s cornball city anthem, “That’s My Wonderful Town” (performed with lovely drowsy slack precision by The Supers), Stockton demonstrates an awareness of the sentimental, kitschy traps of civic boosterism and yet delivers a moving, penetrating examination of those abiding, sometimes contradictory affections one can develop in long-term relationships with a partner, a lover, a parent, or, yes, even an old “Pile of Bones.”

## Lightyear

2003 3m *prod* Sok Cinema, *d/an/pb/ed* Dan Sokolowski.

Ottawa independent filmmaker and animator Dan Sokolowski continues his remarkably kinetic combinations of oil-on-glass animation and live action in his latest work, *Lightyear* (see his 2001 film *winter(time)* and others). The images for the film were shot over a one-year period around Sokolowski’s rural home near Kemptville, Ontario. *Lightyear* is divided into 12 sections based on the number of new moons, Twelve is a continuing theme with each section having 12 photographic images and then a corresponding animation that lasts for 12 frames, so that each segment lasts 12 seconds. Shot on an animation stand and made without edits, this rhythmic hybridized étude celebrates the natural world and questions our aesthetic responses to it. Echoing generations of Canadian artists, writers, musicians and filmmakers, Sokolowski keeps asking: How *do* we interpret and express this landscape we find ourselves in? Unpretentious and searching, located somewhere between the live-action/animation collisions of Norman McLaren, the temporal investigations of Jack Chambers and image interrogations of David Rimmer, the work of Dan Sokolowski is both building and furnishing its own distinctive and distinguished cinematic home in the Canadian landscape.