

Stepping Cap Tourmente

Reviewed by Claire Valade

Cap Tourmente

Directed and written by Michel Langlois, produced by Bernadette Payeur, with Roy Dupuis, Elise Guilbault, Andrée Lachapelle and Gilbert Sicotte. An ACPAV production in association with the National Film Board of Canada.

Cap Tourmente may be Michel Langlois' first feature, but he has already established a solid reputation for himself in the industry. As a scriptwriter, he has collaborated with Léa Pool on *La Femme de l'hôtel* and *À corps perdu*, as well as Jacques Leduc on *Trois pommes à côté sommeil*, and as a director, he has shot award-winning short films and tv movies. This makes my task here slightly delicate because it is not exactly easy to say you disliked a film when the director's talent seems to be appreciated by so many. In this case, "dislike" is perhaps too harsh a word. My feeling was rather one of disappointment in front of something that promised so much at the start, but unfortunately never quite delivers.

The film tells the complicated story of a family of three—Jeanne, the mother, her daughter Alfa, and her son Alex—stigmatized by their burning love for each other and broken promises, set against the backdrop of the St. Lawrence River. It is the return of Alex, the cherished son, and Jean-Louis, a long lost friend, which reopens ancient wounds, and precipitates the psychological turmoil. For *Cap Tourmente* not only refers to a geographical outpost overlooking the St. Lawrence River, but it also represents the torture of passion, as *tourmente* means "turmoil, storm."

This is where problems start. The whirlwind in which the characters are caught also sweeps away the film itself. The core of the entire story rests on Alex's (Roy Dupuis, *Being at Home with Claude*) charm and charisma, which has

to make him so irresistible that he brings everyone down with him in his fall from grace. But Alex's presence is neither charismatic, nor threatening, merely childish and whimsical. Basically, you just want to slap him around.

Having said that, there are some precious acting moments in the film: emotions passing on Jeanne's (Andrée Lachapelle) face (what an exceptional actress!); despair in Alfa's (Elise Guilbault) eyes; Gilbert Sicotte's solid presence as Jean-Louis; and some brief, but remarkable appearances by supporting players (especially Luc Picard and *metteur-en-scène* André Brassard). Cinematographer Eric Cayla's close attention to the drama unfolding on the actors' faces is also evident, serving their performances well. His photography confirms the promise of great new talent, with his very effective use of the Charlevoix region's particular colours and sunlight (diffuse and harsh at the same time), and in the way he reflects them in the characters' immediate environment.

Cap Tourmente relies on creating atmosphere, and keeping a delicate balance between strong symbolism and harsh reality. Unfortunately, it crosses too many fine lines in the process. One of the symbols is the sea, and its overwhelming power of attraction, but the film only gives glimpses of it, except for the opening and closing shots. It is like a door partly opened on a fascinating universe, only

to shut before we have time to appreciate it fully. A film can tell the intricate story of a claustrophobic relationship like this one, but it shouldn't become intricate and claustrophobic itself, just like a film can tell a story about boredom, but shouldn't become boring in the process.

Cap Tourmente evolves at a slow pace, with bursts of high energy in critical moments. However, instead of creating a rhythm, director Langlois constantly breaks it. The film wants to talk about drifting and instability, but becomes erratic itself. There is too much implied, too much ambiguity in both images and words, and the editing is never tight enough to prevent the



Elise Guilbault and Roy Dupuis

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promises
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film from becoming confused about its own direction.

In the end, *Cap Tourmente* becomes trapped by its own devices and symbols, and the turmoil seems useless. The film is never given the chance to be evocative, to bring us somewhere, or give us

Razor—Red X

something. It is one round trip, bringing us almost exactly where we were at the beginning, and it is just terribly irritating •

Claire Valade is a filmmaker and freelance journalist living in Montreal.

Reviewed by Marva Jackson

Stepping Razor—Red X

Directed and written by Nicholas Campbell, produced and photographed by Edgar Egger, with Lloyd 'Rocky' Allen, Edward 'Biggs' Allen, Andrea Davis and Ras Leon. A Nicolas Stiliadis and Syd Cappe Production for SC Entertainment International.

*"It is only the truth that can make man free."
Peter Tosh*

Visionary musician Peter Tosh, co-founder of the trailblazing reggae group The Wailers, lived by the truth the way some people live by the sword. Some say that he was murdered at the age of 43 because of his penchant for honest, direct questioning of the role of politicians and the rich in the oppression of people. Others say that Tosh's death may have been due to his financial commitment to a friend, who was intent on buying a Jamaican radio station which would have placed Rastafarian liberation philosophy front and centre within Jamaica's cultural arena. These points are brought home by Nicholas Campbell and Edgar Egger, makers of the film *Stepping Razor—Red X*, as they piece together a compelling work that gives serious consideration to the many rumours and speculations which have arisen about Tosh's untimely death. By allowing Jamaican voices to take over the film, the filmmakers have created a vivid, powerful documentary built around the autobiographical *Red X* tapes (an oral

journal of socio-political analysis, spiritual beliefs, and mystical experiences recorded by Tosh from 1983 until his death in 1987), as well as interviews with family, friends and acquaintances. Bringing to life the Trenchtown of Tosh's youth, this lush, heady film is full of romantic legends and vital actualities which comprise the real stuff of Peter Tosh's life. Within a couple of hours, viewers are introduced to a boiled down history of Jamaica's contemporary political and musical history from Rastafarian and non-Rastafarian perspectives. Peter Tosh's life is sketched, using archival images of the Jamaican ghetto, electoral struggles, and recordings by The Wailers from their inception as an early rhythm and blues group.

Stepping Razor—Red X is a wonderfully culture specific film that makes no excuses for Tosh, but allows viewers to experience the life of the man who is often described as the revolutionary Wailer. The film is special because of the way voices of organic and other Jamaican cultural workers and intellectuals, such as Dermott Hussey, Joe Higgs and Garth White (so rarely heard in the mainstream) are used. This is definitely a story of Rasta—powerful with divergent faces of Rasta men who embrace Rastafari within a Jamaican context. However, there is some attempt to weave women's voices throughout, including interviews with Tosh's mother Alvera Morris Coke, and his cousin Pauline Morris, along with his wife Marlene Brown, and others who knew Tosh.

Viewers are swept along in a Rastafari *mise-en-scène* unveiled in the essence of ganja, with a man who simply believed in the truth of poor people. Opening with Coke's memories of her only child, *Stepping Razor—Red X* is a potent inquiry into the events surrounding Tosh's death; into the impact of the star system of the mainstream music industry on the evolution of The Wailers; and of the dynamic trio—Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and Bob Marley—as individuals and as friends. Awash in the sounds of



Peter Tosh:
"Without truth there is no consciousness"

Rastafarian drumming, roots reggae lyrics, and rousing music, *Stepping Razor* grips viewers in an intensely personal conversation with Tosh, a man full of contradictions, who was fearless in speaking out against social injustice, yet seemed increasingly fearful of duppies (ghosts). In the end, we are affirmed in the understanding that "without truth there is no consciousness," and embracing everything—fear, truth, anger, compassion and action—makes us human • *Marva Jackson works at Full Frame Distribution and writes a column for Metro Word.*