

shortTAKES

BY Tom McSorley



Image courtesy of The Canadian Film Centre

Winter Sun

2002, 22 MINUTES

WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY JESSICA BRADFORD

Vancouver filmmaker Jessica Bradford's quiet, introspective examination of sibling love is filled with potential. While *Winter Sun* does not fully realize its many possibilities, it is nonetheless a watchable, handsomely rendered drama of love and longing. Iona (played to perfection by Michelle Nolden) awaits the return of her brother, Duncan, who left home when he was 17 to travel the world. Bradford intercuts flashbacks of the pair when they were young with Iona's memories and interior meditations on her absent, idealized brother. When he returns and becomes romantically involved with Iona's feckless friend, Zoe, the film's tensions—hitherto suggestive of incest, desperate loneliness, and a haunted past—go slack and conventional. Sadly, the rich ambiguities of the early part of the film are sacrificed to narrative melodrama later. Moreover, the film is on occasion a little too literary for its own good (lines like "I have fed upon the pulse and fever of his life," and "His passion runs in dark subterranean passages" risk the colour purple and a rolling of eyes). Despite its fissures and excesses, *Winter Sun* still delivers with Patrick McGowan's superb cinematography, and Bradford's often sensitive and intelligent writing and direction.

Devouring Buddha

2002, 16 MINUTES

DIRECTED BY KORBETT MATTHEWS

Talented Ottawa filmmaker Korbett Matthews comes perilously close to over-aestheticizing his powerful subject matter in this visually and aurally stunning documentary about Cambodia. Close, but not quite. His film is an examination of the mass murder committed by Khmer Rouge revolutionaries between 1975 and 1979. Returning to the now empty Tuol Sleung Prison, where thousands perished, Matthews' camera searches through its absences and evokes echoes of its past horrors. Skillfully interweaving vivid moving images with montages of the black and white photos taken by the Khmer Rouge of their victims, Matthews constructs an eerie, haunting tone poem about an atrocious period and place. The film explains how the Khmer Rouge attempted to deny their victims an afterlife. The slaughtered were buried in mass graves near the "killing fields," and not cremated as is normal Buddhist practice; as a result, they were denied their faith's promise of reincarnation. Beyond illuminating the obvious paradoxes represented by the Khmer Rouge's photographs, Matthews' film constitutes a sincere attempt to create a modest form of cinematic remembrance, perhaps even reincarnation. Finely balancing its reverence for the victims and its rage against the Rouge, *Devouring Buddha* is an affecting experimental documentary about the spaces between what remains and what is remembered.

Straight In the Face

2002, 12 MINUTES

WRITTEN BY KAREN X. TULCHINSKY

DIRECTED BY PETER DEMAS

Guess who's coming to dinner? When Nicoletta brings her boyfriend Daniel over to her father Eli's place for dinner, tongues start wagging. Eli's partner Steve is certain that Daniel is gay. Eli thinks Steve is wrong and is flirting way too much with his daughter's beau. Meanwhile, Nicoletta's Greek aunt Antonia squabbles with Steve about what should be served at dinner. The temperature rises and the questions multiply: Is he or isn't he? Will Nicoletta get her man? Will they dine on moussaka or sea bass? As a domestic debacle looms and the sexual orientation bets are metaphorically placed, Daniel speaks of his love of Broadway musicals, interior decorating, and a paper he once wrote on homo-eroticism in *West Side Story*. Steve is convinced and, in the plot's weakest section, summons his friend Marilyn away from her latest loveless date to come over immediately to confirm his theory. This lively comedy of manners features a fine ensemble cast well-directed by Peter Demas and beautifully photographed by Arthur E. Cooper. An amusing send-up of stereotypes that also affirms a few along the way, *Straight In the Face* is a crisply paced, witty entertainment.