

Stroke and Something to Cry About

By Patricia Thompson

An executive returns to his apartment feeling tired and vaguely unwell. A beeper sounds, and he pulls an electronic notebook from his pocket. It's 6:30. Time to exercise. In the bleak, dark room, filled with gadgets and state-of-the-art wizardry, Nathan (J. Gregory MacLaren) opens up a package, finds a videotape from his family and a note telling him to play it on his birthday. Checking the answering machine, he hears his neighbour worrying about not taking proper care of his apartment in his absence, and lamenting the fact his goldfish has died. She promises to make it up to him when returns.

Nathan drags out his rowing machine, centres it in front of the tv, throws on the tape, and starts to push and pull. All his nearest and dearest are gathered together. His father remarks that they haven't seen him for some while, and his mother is upset but trying to be nice. Nathan suddenly seizes up and crashes off the machine to the floor.

He slowly comes around. The telephone is ringing, and his girlfriend berates him on the answering machine for not staying in touch. It is then that Nathan realizes his left side is paralyzed and all his technology is not much help to him. He cannot reach the telephone. His closed-circuit monitor reveals his neighbour approaching, but he can only moan, and she does not wish to intrude on his apparent grief for the deceased goldfish. A delivery boy hears noises, listens at the door, shrugs, and goes away. The family video runs on. Now they are at dinner with a Happy Birthday banner strung across the table as Nathan goes in and out of consciousness. Friends ar-

rive, he sees them on the monitor, but the intercom is out of reach. Fade to black.

A taut tale, ingeniously plotted, and with superior, non-intrusive original music that heightens the images. The contrasts between the spartan technological surroundings of Nathan's apartment, and the cozy suburban home life

of his family, the fussy neighbour, and the stylish friends, are marked with touches of humour and insight. *Stroke* was picked for the *Un certain regard* section of this year's Cannes International Film Festival •

Stroke—Directed, written and edited by Mark Sawers. 35mm/video, 16 min. Available from CFMDC West.



Something to Cry About

An in-your-face stream of dialogue



Stroke

J. Gregory MacLaren fades to black

A teen-ager in a basement, locked in, moving about restlessly and turning to the camera, spews out his monologue. He's feuding with his father over an auto-borrowing incident which ended ignominiously with a scratch on the passenger side, "eight inches wide bumper-to-bumper," while he was backing it into the garage. All his father's pride and joy appears to be centred on the car, a steel-blue Jaguar convertible. The boy (Bret Pearson) has been below for over 23 hours and is badly in need of a wiener fix. In a veritable avalanche of words, he guides us through a chain of circumstances leading up to his taking the Jag. He's home alone. His parents have gone away, but they leave the car keys—they trust him. There's nothing in the house, so he steals the milk money to buy a pizza. This, as he elegantly puts it, is the beginning of a serious descent into hell. All bases are covered. He rakes his parents over the coals for their pc attitudes, obsession with the environment, toxic waste, and recycling. He speculates about his father (voiced by Don Francks) who throws food down the laundry chute while asking how he'll pay for the \$5,000 scratch. The boy admits to having an ulcer, sees a therapist, and some days at school he doesn't talk. His teachers think he's on drugs. He fantasizes that his father is going to kill him. He admits to being scared and thinks his father is too, but they can't talk.

An in-your-face stream of dialogue from a teen-ager adrift in a comfortable milieu, who desperately wants his parents to talk and really love him. The beligerent teen-ager prowls round the small basement, flinging his words past the camera and involving the viewer in his misery, touched with a great deal of pathos. The wry, aggressive and ultimately touching script was a deservedly big winner at the recent Yorkton Short Film and Video Festival •

Something to Cry About—Directed and produced by Terry Steyn, written by Laurie Pearson. 16mm/video, 22 min.

Patricia Thompson is the editor of Film Canada Yearbook.

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