

By
Tom McSorley**THE BRIDAL PATH**Directed by Cynthia Roberts. Written by Melissa Cox. Produced by Remo Giraldo.
Canadian Film Centre. 18min. 16mm 1998

Sam and Jack are getting married. As they wait anxiously for the troubled interpersonal mechanics of the wedding day to work themselves out, the couple exchange a secret set of vows by telephone. Meanwhile, Sam's divorced parents resume their bickering, the relatives arrive with agendas, kids and canines, and a bemused photographer stages and snaps shots in the gathering chaos of the big day. Through the intimate trace of Roberts's hand-held camera, we gradually become aware of the disparity between those happy wedding photos and the uncomfortable realities behind them. While this in itself is not great insight, the subtle revelation of multiple layers of tension surrounding bride and groom gives the drama its surprising and satisfying range of tones—joy, sadness, pathos and bathos. This perceptive study of the rigors of ritual is also aided by the assured and authoritative performances of the entire cast, particularly in the complex portrait of Sam rendered by the radiant Catherine McGregor. Written by Melissa Cox and directed with sensitivity by Roberts, *The Bridal Path* is intelligent and engaging evidence—as if we need more—that weddings are for everybody but the bride and groom. ●

HARRY KNUCKLESDirected, written and produced by Lee Demarbre.
Independent Filmmakers Co-operative of Ottawa. 5 min. 16mm 1998

From the long, noble and utterly twisted tradition of Canadian parody/comedy comes *Harry Knuckles*, a clever trailer for a nonexistent action film. With loving homages to Jackie Chan, John Woo, Jet Li and Russ Meyer, Ottawa filmmaker Lee Demarbre's lively *faux* trailer promotes a film about a deadly virus that could wipe out all of humanity unless kept in the "hands of a righteous man," a man (you guessed it) with hairy knuckles. Replete with an authentic MPAA title card noting that the preview has been rated for "All Audiences," *Harry Knuckles* boasts precise, breakneck editing, inventive—and derivative!—fight sequences staged in Ottawa's ugliest and prettiest locations and an infectious sense of humour. Demarbre's cockeyed kinetic kickfest features Ottawa actor Phil Graham in a compelling and charismatic screen debut as Harry. Featured recently at the Fant-Asia festivals in Montreal and Toronto, this mini-epic of hirsute hands announces an energetic new talent working in the same warped hemisphere that produced *SCTV*, John Paizs, Guy Maddin and many more. ●

FIRE & ICE

Directed, written and produced by Dan Sokolowski. Sok Cinema. 3 min. 16mm 1998

Remember the ice storm of January 1998? Dan Sokolowski does. He lived through it. Like any hardy and self-respecting Canuck artist who's been awestruck by the power of winter (and the list includes such luminaries as Lawren Harris, Jean-Paul Lemieux and Jean Pierre Lefebvre), Sokolowski has made art out of his elemental encounter. A concise, economical combination of still photographs, sounds of branches straining and cracking, a sliver of animation, and the neutral readings of Environment Canada weather warnings by filmmaker Frank Cole, this modest marvel is a richly detailed, oddly amusing portrait of what were officially described as "ice-paralyzed areas." Beyond the empirical evidence of the stark beauty of the images of this frozen world (trees, road signs, a Canadian flag), Sokolowski's film suggests the sinister and ephemeral quality of all "fixed" forms of language, technology, even cinema. Part epistemological tone poem, part home movie, and reminiscent of the famed Unit B documentaries of the NFB, *Fire & Ice* is a meditative, minimalist and startlingly expansive dissection of a natural disaster. ●

MICHEL IN THE SUETEDirected, written and produced by Neal Livingston. Black River Productions.
5 min. 16mm 1998

Ah, the weather. We share it. We live in it. We live with it. We talk about it. We make films about it (see above). With nothing but sounds of driving winds and images of a man trying to walk, open doors and hang a sheet on the clothesline during a *suede* (a windstorm) on the coast of Cape Breton, Neal Livingston's delightful new film sketches a witty existential struggle worthy of Buster Keaton or Wile E. Coyote. So ridiculously powerful is the *suede* that as Michel staggers (and I mean staggers) around in the wind, we're convinced that he's got to be pretending, or at least exaggerating. Sensing this, Livingston has Michel open a plastic bag, demonstrating instantly that truth is windier than fiction. Despite an obvious and unnecessary sequence where Michel tries to sit on a chair and read a newspaper (*à la* Buster Keaton in *The Railrodder*), this is a kooky, totally absorbing document of our dogged, awkward, very funny and very Canadian dance with the weather. ●