



Chris Landreth's and Alias/Wavefront's *Bingo*

By Tom McSorley

Bingo

Directed by Chris Landreth. Alias/Wavefront. 5 minutes. 1998.

While this impressive short at times resembles a show reel for 3-D computer animation techniques, *Bingo* does cleverly combine an absurdist play with animation's intrinsic anarchic possibilities. Based on a theatre piece called *Disregard This Play*, the action of *Bingo* revolves literally and figuratively around a young man who is told that his name is Bingo by a belligerent clown, a grotesque little girl and a strange creature called The Money Guy. Accosted repeatedly and loudly, the man eventually begins to think that maybe his name actually is Bingo. Familiar yet still compelling late-20th-century themes of identity, alienation and media manipulation swirl through this impressive Ionesco-influenced absurdist tale of individuality under siege. Paradoxically, the unsettling narrative is rendered in seamless computer animation, itself a source of considerable epistemological anxiety with its extraordinarily convincing ability to distort what we perceive and confuse what we think is real. ●

How Wings Are Attached to the Backs of Angels

Directed and written by Craig Welch. National Film Board. 11 minutes. 1996.

Somehow overlooked on the festival circuit, Craig Welch's unsettling nocturne about life and death did open in cinemas for David Cronenberg's *Crash* and is now available on an NFB compilation tape, *Tales From the Dark Side*. A lonely man in an empty mansion builds skeleton models and dreams of how to make wings for the human form. When a woman drifts into his house, everything changes. Rendered in arresting black-and-white drawings, *Wings* re-examines the Icarus myth as search not for freedom but for control. In addition, extending the themes in Welch's earlier, and decidedly more cartoony *No Problem* (1992), this film is an icy gothic sliver of masculinity in crisis. Unable to control the world beyond his doors, and confused by his own desires, the protagonist constructs his own prison. In Welch's tasteful, intelligent film, it's clear that the impulse to control is death itself, or, to invoke Wordsworth's telling dictum, "We murder to dissect." ●

Linear Dreams

Directed and written by Richard Reeves. 7 minutes. 1997.

In the midst of all the slick technology available to animators, and the corresponding fetishization of computer animation's smoothness, it's refreshing to encounter a film like Richard Reeves's stunning *Linear Dreams*. Forget slick, this propulsive animation places the glory of the grainy, crackly, hissing material medium of film at the centre of its aesthetic universe. Firmly located in the tradition of Norman McLaren, Len Lye and, more recently, Pierre Hébert, Reeves's scratch-on-film "cameraless" movie both reveals and revels in its own material construction, audio and visual. With a pulsing musical soundtrack, pregnant with static, the film discharges images ranging from abstract shapes to bursts of colour to crude cave-painting figures of animals to striking mountainous landscapes. Raw and poetic, *Linear Dreams* not only affirms the continuing vitality of a Canadian animation tradition, but also demonstrates that creation need not involve computer software, but simply a pair of hands and some celluloid. Indeed, as Gordon Downie, another Canadian poet in another medium, writes, "Your fingers start to wiggle and landscapes emerge." ●

AMF'S Tiresias

Directed and written by Ann Marie Fleming. Sleepy Dog Films. 5 minutes. 1998.

Bristling with wit and insouciance, independent filmmaker Ann Marie Fleming's contemporary adaptation of the classical myth of Tiresias is a playful rumination on gender relations, power and sexuality. While Jupiter and Juno, king and queen of the gods, argue over who has the best sex, a wise man, Tiresias, is turned into a woman after he strikes copulating snakes with his stick. As a young woman, Tiresias discovers what Juno already knows: women have the best sex. However, when age and gravity hit the body, Tiresias's sexual and social power droop precipitously. Fleming uses to great effect her marvellously expressive stick figures with, shall we say, genital enhancements. She also places all the narrative action within a small frame, visually emphasizing that, to rework an old saw, the more things change the more we should change the frame. ●

Gerald the Genie

Directed, produced and animated by Patrick Lowe. Ubus Films. 8 minutes. 1997.

From our home and native land of identity crises arrives another example, an odd, endearing blob of a character named Gerald, the humble star of Winnipeg filmmaker Patrick Lowe's animated contribution to the swollen ranks of Canadian uncertainty. Set against a blank white backdrop (*tabula rasa*, anyone?), the beleaguered Gerald gamely tries to accommodate his image to the questions and demands made by various off-screen voices. Even their words, appearing large on-screen throughout the film, dominate his space. Finding answers to others, questions can be both exhausting and frustrating, as he soon discovers through many and often radical transformations. Gerald, though, knows more than his interrogators. Although Lowe's film occasionally threatens to collapse under its own overstatement, *Gerald the Genie* is nevertheless a useful reminder of the limitations of logocentricity, not to mention an encouraging parable for misfits everywhere. ●