

By Tom McSorley

Zabava

Written and directed by Greg Klymkiw. Cinema Zabava, 1999. 22 min., 16mm.

As one of Canada's most imaginative and courageous independent producers, Greg Klymkiw has helped create impressive feature films by such filmmakers as Guy Maddin, John Paizs, Cynthia Roberts, Bruno Pacheco, Alan Zweig and others. Now Klymkiw has revealed his considerable talents as a writer/director with *Zabava*, a Cassavetes-meets-Shebib-meets-Bergman descent into the lower depths of hoser masculinity. It's Conrad's birthday. His friends want to get him laid, especially because this year his birthday falls on an annual celebration this shaggy misogynist foursome call "man's day." So, it's off to score some Ukrainian-Canadian women at a local *zabava*, (Ukrainian for party). When shy and awkward Conrad (an engaging Christopher Robertson) meets Kathy (the luminous Tamara Robbins), they hit it off and end up at his apartment. Soon after, his three drinking buddies arrive. While Kathy waits naked in his room, Conrad explains his success to the lads. Bemused, they guzzle beer and insist that the woman he's just slept with is a promiscuous slattern with a predilection for group sex. Tension mounts as Connie, is convinced to ask her if she'll let his friends join them. Rendered in rich, unsparing black and white, *Zabava* alternates tonally between Conrad's initially good humoured and sensitive encounter with the woman, and a deeply unsettling dread of the possibility of sexual aggression. Unflinchingly honest and perceptive, Klymkiw's directorial debut is a devastating dramatic dissection of just how strangely caring, potentially dangerous, and downright idiotic male bonding can be. •

Exhuming Tyler

Written and directed by Merlin Dervisevic. Canadian Film Centre, 1999. 22 min., 16mm.

What's with Canadians and corpses? There's several in Claude Jutra's *Mon oncle Antoine*, some dreamily irrepressible ones in Guy Maddin's films, and, of course, we all remember what Molly Parker's character in *Kissed* does with them. Into this rather odd necrophiliac subgenre of Canadian cinema walks Tyler, a lonely introverted mortician who befriends the corpses housed in his family's funeral home. *Exhuming Tyler* is the story of the personal crisis caused when this idiosyncratic, innocently ghoulish character is asked to move out by his brother's exasperated wife. Confronting his fear of the outside world, Tyler is counselled by a group of chatty, opinionated and horizontal advisors—the corpses. As they comment on Tyler's sister-in-law and on Tyler's own problems, they move him toward a modest form of courage. In addition to its sharply observant dialogue and fine performances (especially Michael Proudfoot as Tyler), Dervisevic's refreshing, intelligent short offers a sly exploration of the role of death in individual psychology and in collective consciousness. While occasionally verging on—pardon the expression—terminal archness, *Exhuming Tyler* manages to maintain the proper balance of irony and compassion as its protagonist struggles with an array of very irrational and very real human fears. •



Zabava

Anderson Unbound

Directed by Sheldon Serkin, written by Randall Cole. Canadian Film Centre, 1999. 17 min., 16mm.

When nebbish salesman Anderson (played to Woody Allenish perfection by David Boyce) takes a seminar on conflict management, his life is transformed. With the application of a few short, snappy phrases and techniques, Anderson discovers, all of life's senseless conflicts can be resolved. After the seminar, he encounters two men fighting in a nearby park. Now a trained mediator, Anderson decides he must intervene, armed not only with good intentions, but also with, as he remembers proudly via the film's clever use of intertitles, the very latest conflict management strategies. Kinetic and only a little too long, Serkin's deftly directed film skewers a society hopelessly obsessed with experts, self-help gurus and consultants who have convinced us that only they can help us to help ourselves. Located somewhere between the breakneck cartoony violence of Tex Avery and the smart pop-culture satire of John Paizs, *Anderson Unbound* supplies ample, hilarious proof that, in a world where U.S. Presidents talk about using words to settle disputes at the very moment they are bombing others, talk is indeed cheap. Alas, it would seem that conflict management seminars, while very expensive, are cheaper still. •

Nobody's Nothing

Written and directed by Bridget Farr. A farr-out production, 1999. 4 min., 35mm.

Ottawa-based filmmaker Bridget Farr's second short is a striking, high-contrast black-and-white examination of urban alienation. Partially funded, ironically enough, by the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, *Nobody's Nothing* is a concentrated and defiant defence of individual identity in a world collapsing into high-velocity enchantments of technology and mass consumption. Eschewing dialogue, Farr prefers to allow image and sound to collide and suggest possibilities of response. Utilizing extremely high-contrast cinematography, optical tricks and a wonderfully dirty post-industrial soundscape, Farr's film observes a single figure (Ian Driscoll) wandering isolated through various streets, buildings, and highways. The figure is anonymous, and his image is manipulated and obscured by a visually arresting and thematically appropriate scratch-on-film technique. Aside from one unnecessarily obvious sequence where the wandering figure carries a "Reduced To Clear" sign, *Nobody's Nothing* is a precise and poetic articulation of urban angst and solitude. With minimal means and maximum imagination, Bridget Farr has rendered an absorbing and daring portrait of the nation's capital at the end of the 20th century, a portrait much more relevant and memorable than a myriad of images of Mounties and Parliament buildings. •