

Laurence Green's *Thin Ice*

## Thin Ice

2000 56m, prod NFB, p Gerry Flahive, d Laurence Green; with Bruce McCall

"Why are so many of my friends Canadians?" asks Steve Martin of his pal Bruce McCall, in Laurence Green's documentary about the Ontario-born humorist. From his childhood days in Simcoe to his family's move to east-end Toronto, McCall's contempt for his home and native land drives him headlong into the American dream. Dominated by a charismatic, peripatetic civil-servant father, he speaks openly about his emotional scarring under the shadow of the patriarch. Framed by preparations for a New York gallery opening of McCall's paintings, Green's clever portrait includes standard-issue interview sequences, offbeat archival footage, home movies and an original and amusing 1950's faux film trailer about a boy growing up in Ontario and dreaming of the riches and delights of America. McCall says he always imagined his life on the screen as a Hollywood drama; instead, he notes wryly, it'll be a documentary made by the NFB. A subtle investigation of the processes of colonialization and psychology of need, *Thin Ice* is a film about one expatriate Canuck's strangely desperate desire for American affirmation. It is also a tale of a highly successful man who has, consciously or not, merely substituted one dominating father figure for another, the United States of America. •

## Mai en decembre (Godard en Abitibi)

2000 25m, prod NFB, p André Gladu, d Julie Perron

In a darkroom floating in a bath of developer an image slowly materializes. It is a photograph of a small man with dark-rimmed glasses on the snowy December streets of Abitibi, Quebec. Expanding upon this unlikely image, Julie Perron constructs an engaging film about the visit of French *nouvelle vague* icon/iconoclast, Jean-Luc Godard, to a small town in Quebec. In the wake of the May 1968 student protests in France, Godard visited Montreal and accepted an invitation to go to Abitibi. Though overly awed by the very fact of Godard actually being there, the film offers a fascinating glimpse of his ability to reorient thought processes and detonate established paradigms. In this case, while being interviewed on a local television show he gets up and moves behind the camera talking about the relationship between what is and what is not in the frame. The local crew and interviewer alike are both flummoxed and impressed. Less obviously, Perron suggests the uneasy nature of the political relationship between emergent nationalist Québécois artists and the former imperial motherland, la France. Intelligently constructed and with enough humour to moderate its overly earnest tone, *Mai en decembre (Godard en Abitibi)* marks the arrival of a promising filmmaker. •

## Tango in a Cold City

2000 42m, prod NFB, exp Louise Lore, p Peter Starr, d/sc Alastair Brown

What could be more Canadian than tango? It's about longing to be elsewhere (see *Thin Ice*) and it's about solitude and passion – all aspects of the Canadian immigrant experience. Brown's sumptuous documentary focuses on a tango club in downtown Toronto founded by a Canadian, Keith Elshaw, and his Argentine expatriate wife and tango expert, Cristina Rey. Now divorced, the couple keeps the tango club alive. We meet the regulars at the club, who include a Vietnamese barber, a Scottish engineer and a Bay Street executive who hopes he can apply the supple gestalt of tango dancing to his own business practices. Along the way we learn of the Argentine Diaspora now living in Toronto, we hear from an Argentine tango troupe, and, in the film's most unnecessary passage, we observe that Keith's new love interest from Montreal fails to show up for a weekend in Toronto. In among the sometimes compelling, often banal theorizing about tango's cultural significance, the most apposite comment of all belongs to Cristina Rey. She offers this poignant and penetrating prescription for the pragmatic, goal-oriented, Great White Puritan northern city she now inhabits: "We need to touch." Although gorgeously photographed by Derek Rogers, *Tango In A Cold City* is, unfortunately, only partially successful in persuading us that she is right. •

## Journey to Little Rock

2000 52m, prod North East Productions, p Maria Yongmee Shin, d Rob Thompson; with Minnijean Brown Trickey

This thoughtful film chronicles the remarkable life of Minnijean Brown Trickey, one of the members of the famed "Little Rock Nine." In 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, nine black high-school students were escorted by U.S. Army soldiers to the formerly white-only high school during those explosive early days of desegregation. Forged in that crucible of intolerance, Minnijean's life of political activism seems inevitable. She went on to university, married, moved with her husband to Canada during the Vietnam War and lived on the land in northern Ontario. In recent years, she has fought prejudice and injustice throughout Canada. As she reflects on her life, the film weaves itself around the 1997 Little Rock Nine 40th-anniversary celebrations at the White House, where another Little Rocker, President Bill Clinton, awarded them Congressional medals for bravery. While it loses its sharp focus in connecting Minnijean to a variety of contemporary protest movements, *Journey to Little Rock* smartly refuses the temptation to romanticize its subject and offers revealing, painful glimpses of the personal costs of political struggle. Nothing is given. All must be fought for. There is a price to be paid, but, as Minnijean's extraordinary life so passionately demonstrates, when it comes to political and social change, it's up to us.

TAKE ONE