

Film Reviews / Critiques de films

NOT MAD, BUT MAGICAL

Children's Favourites: Tales of Wonder, a compilation video of "The Boy and the Snow Goose," directed by Gayle Thomas; "The Long Enchantment," directed by Françoise Hartmann; "The Magic Flute," directed by Gayle Thomas. National Film Board of Canada, 1995. 29:34 mins., \$26.95 VHS. ISBN 0-7722-0548-5.

Since the National Film Board of Canada's early days, the company has been known for innovation and quality. Norman McLaren, in his desire to expand the creative possibilities of animation, did radical things like draw directly onto film, and he never seems to have had the pressure put on to develop more assembly line techniques. McLaren was hired as far back as 1941. Many years later, in the ultra-commercial nineties, the NFB is still producing personal and unique animation.

Children's Favourites: Tales of Wonder is a compilation VHS of three animated tales. The final story, "The Magic Flute," carries the surprising copyright date of 1977; "The Boy and The Snow Goose" was made in 1984, "The Long Enchantment" in 1993. Don't worry that they're not the latest thing: these quality tales don't need sell-by dates.

In an age when magic is more often made hard edged and crazy—think of that grinning, bright blue genie in Walt Disney's recent, animated *Aladdin*—the soft wisps of wonder contained in each of these tales are welcome. In "The Boy and The Snow Goose," the adventure gently develops from the caring a young boy shows toward an injured animal. The geese in the tale never speak or sing, not even to each other; the wonder is simply that when they quack, as geese do, the boy knows exactly what they're communicating. So do viewers. Thus, rather than having the animals become part of our world, we are led to enter into theirs. That, of course, is the kind of magical happening we all have a real chance of encountering.

"The Long Enchantment" is visually beautiful, and has a level-headed, triumphant heroine. The central part of Flora's adventure takes her to a shimmering forest; here the colours and costumes are from the Middle Ages, and the angular gestures of the spellbinder's hands come right out of a medieval tapestry. Every frame is gorgeous, and repeated viewing reveals additional detail of colour and action. Typical of NFB animation, the compelling sense of style will engage even mom's and dad's attention, over and over again.

Music and sound effects are subtly orchestrated in each tale. In "The Magic Flute," the first thing we hear is the wind blowing, then a young boy humming and finally just a bit of music, when the wind blows through an abandoned flute.

Viewers have to settle in to watch and listen carefully. As with tales told by the best storytellers, these three animations get attention not through sound and fury but by a wise seduction.

Kaija Pepper worked in British television production for ten years. She is the editor of *Dance Central*, the Vancouver dance community's newsletter.

ANNOUNCEMENTS / ANNONCES

The Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books will re-open in its new location in late-September 1995. Its new address is: 239 College St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5T 1R5. Phone: (416) 393-7753; fax (416) 393-7635. The Osborne Collection encompasses the development of English children's literature from the 14th century to 1910. Holdings include the Lillian H. Smith Collection—children's books of outstanding literary and artistic merit published in English from 1911 to the present—and the Canadiana Collection of current and retrospective creative works for children by Canadians or about Canada. All collections include manuscripts, artwork and other related materials. The Collection welcomes visitors from all over the world and serves scholars, educators, librarians, bibliophiles, children, tourists, and people in business, media and the arts.

Patricia Demers has been given an Honorable Award by the Children's Literature Association Critical Scholarship Awards for her book *P.L. Travers*, published by Twayne Publishers, New York.

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BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE / LIVRES RECENSÉS DANS CE NUMÉRO

- | | |
|---|--|
| Arnold, Frances. <i>We're Still a Family</i> , p. 82 | <i>Backstage</i> , p. 88 |
| Bates, Martine. <i>The Dragon's Tapestry</i> , p. 79 | Little, Jean. <i>His Banner over Me</i> , p. 71 |
| Bayless, Maureen. <i>Strike!</i> , p. 82 | McNicol, Sylvia. <i>Bringing Up Beauty</i> , p. 86 |
| Brandis, Marianne. <i>Fire Ship</i> , p. 76 | Munsil, Janet. <i>Where There's Smoke</i> , p. 82 |
| Buchignani, Walter. <i>Tell No One Who You Are</i> , p. 73 | Plato, Earl. <i>Terror at Snake Hill</i> , p. 76 |
| Crook, Connie Brummel. <i>Flight</i> , p. 76 | Quinlan, Patricia. <i>Tiger Flowers</i> , p. 82 |
| Cumming, Peter. <i>Mogul and Me</i> , p. 78 | Ross, Catherine Sheldrick. <i>Circles</i> , p. 93 |
| Downie, Mary Alice & John. <i>Honor Bound</i> , p. 76 | Spencer, Bev. <i>Guardian of the Dark</i> , p. 79 |
| Jacob, Max. <i>The Story of King Kabul the First & Gawayn the Kitchen-Boy</i> , p. 94 | Stewart, Sean. <i>Nobody's Son</i> , p. 79 |
| Katz, Welwyn Wilton. <i>Come Like Shadows</i> , p. 90 | Stinson, Kathy. <i>Steven's Baseball Mitt</i> , p. 82 |
| Keith, Janet. <i>A Friend among Enemies</i> , p. 73 | Sutow, M. Pauline Murphy. <i>Worse than War: The Halifax Explosion</i> , p. 74 |
| Kitz, Janet. <i>Children of the Halifax Explosion</i> , p. 74 | Walker, John C. <i>In other Words</i> , p. 82 |
| Leblanc, Louise. <i>Sophie part en voyage</i> , p. 87 | Wright, Susan. <i>Real Sisters</i> , p. 82 |
| Lewis, Amanda, and Tim Wynne-Jones. <i>Rosie</i> | Zipes, Jack. <i>Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale</i> , p. 92 |